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SARAH DE BERENGER.

A NOVEL.

BY JEAN INGELOW,

AUTHOR OF "OFF THE SKELLIGS," "FATED TO BE FREE,"
"STUDIES FOR STORIES FROM GIRLS' LIVES,"
"MOPSA THE FAIRY," "POEMS."

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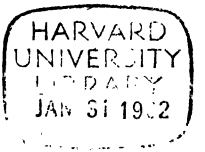

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SARAH DE BERENGER.

CHAPTER I.

"THEN where is that woman now, Mrs. Snep?" asked the curate.

"Well, sir, half-way to the town by this time, I should judge."

Mrs. Snep had a very large wash-tub before her, and was using it with energy in the very small kitchen of a whitewashed cottage. Such a pretty little one-storied abode, so rural, so smothered in greenery. Too much so, indeed, for it stood with its back to a great hop-garden, and the long lines of hop-poles terminating against its wall rose as high as the thatch of the roof, so that all the view obtained out of the kitchen casement was down one long overarched lane of hop-bines, under which the softened light appeared to be endowed with both color and quietness, it was so strangely green and still.

The curate glanced rather helplessly into that shadowy lane. He wished he was a good way down it.

There was something trenchant, capable, and rather defiant about the words and fashions of the cottager's wife. The curate was afraid of her.

Young curates often are afraid, and blush under the eyes of such women. We do not half enough consider their difficulties and their fears, specially that fear of making themselves ridiculous, which, perhaps, under the circumstances, this particular young curate felt just then with all the reason in the world.

However, he made up his mind to do his duty. To that end he said, "Considering how weak she was when I saw her yesterday, poor thing, and how very young her infant is" ("Eleven days old come nine o'clock this evening," Mrs. Snep put in as a parenthesis), "I think her getting as far as the town to-day," he went on, "must be quite impossible."

Mrs. Snep, as he spoke, moved towards the fire. "You'll excuse me, sir," — meaning, "You'll please to get up."

"Oh, certainly," he exclaimed, rising, for the place was so small that unless he made way she could not pass; and she took a large iron pot of boiling water from the fire and emptied it over her cooling suds, before she addressed herself to the task of making him any direct answer.

Then, having set the iron pot on her stone threshold, as if on purpose that in his exit he might knock it over, she ensconced herself behind the mounting clouds of steam, and while energetically rubbing and wringing, said with an air of calm superiority —

"It ain't to be expected, sir, as you should know much about these here things. Not at present. But if you was to ask your ma, she would tell you that poor folks can no ways afford to cocker themselves up as lying-in ladies do. When my oldest was eleven days old I took him on one arm and his father's basket of dinner on t'other, and off to the field with 'em, thinking it no hardship neither. But your knowing the ways of poor folk, let alone the ways of tramps such as she, is not, as I said, at all to be expected."

The curate felt annihilated. She had got the better of him not so much by pointing out his inexperience, as by the use of those words "your ma."

He was young enough to feel keenly ashamed of his youth. She made him feel ignominiously young just then. He actually envied her superior age; and the fulness of her knowledge raised in his mind something like a wholesome fear.

She had, however, intended to express civility.

That a man so young should have been placed over her head as a spiritual guide, when he knew no more about sickness than he did about washing, or, indeed, about many of the other most important and familiar experiences of her life, was a thing at once ridiculous and aggravating; but not the less would she acknowledge that he was a gentleman. Common men had mothers, and were thankful for them, but the delicate-handed woman who had brought him up was worthy of a finer name, so she gave it (as she thought), and politely called her "your ma."

"She's a tramp, sir," proceeded Mrs. Snep; "and in my opinion no better than she should be, though some folks (kind-hearted, if I say it) took pity on her in her trouble and brought her in."

"And were paid for it, I suppose," observed the curate; for the trodden worm will turn; and she had made him smart, and knew it.

"Yes, sir," she answered, with a solemnity most impressive. "I should hope I know better than to throw money into the dirt, away from my own poor husband and children. She paid me, but little enough it were; and glad I were to see the back of her when she went away of her own free will—of her own free will—at ten o'clock this blessed morning."

"Did you show her the path to the road, the road to G——?" inquired the young man.

Mrs. Snep gave an energetic wrench to a much twisted swathe of linen, then shook a snowy drift of foam from her hand with a contemptuous action, as if she was thinking of her late lodger, and made answer—

"No, we'd had words, and I took not to say any particular notice on her when she walked herself off. But she did say, 'Mrs. Snep, you've been a good friend to me, and I ask your pardon if I've offended you, for,' she says, 'I didn't ought to have said it. I've counted over my things now, and I'll allow you're as honest as the day.'"

"As honest as the day," she presently repeated, for she saw that this speech, which was entirely of her own invention, had impressed the curate very much.

But not as she had intended. "I always thought you were robbing that poor thing," was his mental comment on it, "and now I am sure."

"Well, good morning, Mrs. Snep," he exclaimed, forming a sudden resolution. Between his zeal and his discomfiture, he failed to notice the iron pot, which, dashing through the door, he overturned upon a fresh clump of white pinks, blacking them and his own legs, and being obliged to submit to the loan of a duster to wipe them. "I always have to leave that woman with an apology," he exclaimed, as he began to stride along the path towards the town.

He did not find the woman — naturally he did not — though he walked all the way to the town, for he had been right in his belief, and Mrs. Snep wilfully wrong. The woman could only walk a very little way. It was a sultry morning. She was very weak; a little child not two years old dragged upon her gown; she had her infant on her arm, and from it depended a bundle. She had been excited and angry, so that she trembled, and her little strength soon giving way, she turned off the dusty road to court the shade of the hop-garden, skirting it till she reached the end, and intending to enter the road again.

And so it came about that when the curate passed, this woman was still in the hop-garden, within fifty yards of him. Instead of turning to the left and regaining the road, she had taken the path to the right, and after wistfully gazing up some of the narrow bowers of fragrant bines, had crept into the shelter of one of them, all cool and shaded and still; there, propped up by the hop-poles, she wept, at first with a sick heart, but presently she found admittance to the enchanted valley of slumber; and if, instead of that, it had been the lost Eden, secret since our first mother's fault, she could hardly have shown a face of more supreme content.

"Oh, how common, but oh, how sweet is sleep!"

She was tall, dark-haired, and thin. One hand,

which was rather pale than white, touched with protective care the head of her little two-year's-old girl, who, curled up on the skirts of her gown, slept more soundly than herself; the other was spread over her young infant, whose meaningless blue eyes stared up from its mother's lap into the space of sky overhead.

Her possessions were but the clothes she wore — a cotton gown, a flimsy shawl, her small bundle, a little paper parcel of bacon and bread, an almost empty purse, these two infants over whom her heart yearned with unutterable love and despair, and nothing else at all except the wedding-ring — that was conspicuous enough on her honest, labor-hardened hand, and was the symbol of as bad a bargain as ever was made.

She had not lost a good husband by death, but had to mourn a bad one yet in life — a mean and cruel fellow, who from the moment she married him had let her see his contempt for the foolish passion that, spite of warnings, had dared to waste itself on him. She was free of him now for awhile, free from this object of her once impassioned love, and now of her fear and shame. He had been arrested for a robbery with violence, convicted, and sentenced to penal servitude for fourteen years. She had been very foolish, but to know that was no element of consolation.

Her story in brief was this. She had in her early days been employed by a young invalid lady as reader, and when old enough had entered her service. The lady had taken some pains to improve her; the books, also, that she read had enriched her mind; insensibly she had become different, softened. She had a natural love of beauty and harmony; her light tasks and delicate surroundings fostered it.

The rough children she had played with, and her vulgar relatives, became daily more unlike her; their ways, not themselves, became distasteful to her. She envied not so much the rich as the refined.

Oh, to be a lady!

Her old mother in the tripe shop was still dear to her, though she shrank from her petty dishonesties and

sordid aims — still more from the boast she made of these things in the bosom of her family. She hated the meanness, the meagreness, the smallness of life in the lanes, and the "smoots" and the "wynds." She had an ardent, yearning nature, always looking out for something more, something higher; she wanted expansion — bright, soft air, decent living, truth and honesty, and also clean and becoming clothes.

She did not care for the footman's jokes, or even for the butler's gracious smile; courtship from those of her own class did not move her; she had left her world behind, and cared for nothing in it — with one sad, one fatal exception.

Among her better surroundings this one exception had fast hold of her still: a lad with a beautiful face, very pathetic and fair. He was extremely lame of one foot, but contrived to do more mischief than most can though they be swift runners. He could sing, oh, so sweetly; and sometimes when he would pass, while in the dark, with blinds drawn up and the street lamps shining in, she sat watching her sick lady, she could hear him — two or three wild soft notes as he went by — and hear the tap of his weighted shoe, and her whole heart would cry after him. She longed to be walking beside him, in the soft night air, on that wet pavement, walking by him and weeping, asking — could he care for her if she gave him herself and all she had? praying him to be a better lad for her sake.

But it was only her heart that went out to him; she never spoke. He did not love her, nor know how she loved him.

She saw his possibilities, but of course he was not on the way to attain, he never would attain, them, — they had being only in her thought. For this woman was a poet in her degree, which means that she was a partaker of nature's boundless hope. She was made welcome to a hint of nature's wishes.

She was not one of those poets who write verses — very few are; none but such as are poets through and through should ever do that. Verse is only words, the

garment that makes the spirit of poetry visible to others; and poets who have but little of the spirit often fritter that little away in the effort to have it seen. But she was a poet in this, that the elemental passions of our nature were strong in her, and she bowed to them with childlike singleness of soul.

Her love was so fresh, it might no more be withstood than the moss can withstand the dew that drenches it, and makes it sparkle in the morning. Her wonder was more unsated for ever, her hope was more nearly possession than ours. If sorrow came up, it was a dark amazement. Would it not soon be over? There are many days of sunshine for one thunder-storm.

The youth, by name Uzziah Dill, was a journeyman shoemaker; might have done well enough but for his love of drink and bad companions, and for occasional fits of idleness, during which he would sit and brood. Sometimes she would pass him then, and wonder at him — was he in pain? was he wishing to do better? Once, as he sat under a little bridge, hidden to the waist in tall rushes, she went by, and their eyes met; for she had not been able to forbear stopping to say a few civil words to him. His beautiful face was clouded and dissatisfied, but a gleam of surprise lighted it up when he looked at hers. Her fate was sealed. She passed on, her cheek hot with blushes; but he came to see her. She had saved forty pounds, and was then three and twenty. She was easily persuaded that he meant to be a different man. She married him, and in spite of his evil ways, her love died hard, and almost broke her heart. It was not till he had spent all her money, and brought her and their little child into the deepest poverty, that he cured her of it. He had always neglected her, — he now went off with another woman; and jealousy did in one day what coldness and evil living of all other sorts could not have worn out in years.

It was almost noon. The curate had not found her; none had come to help. She slept on, and the least little movement in the air lifted a corner of the old

newspaper in which was wrapped her food. It was shaken loose and rustled, showing its name — The *Suffolk Chronicle*, a provincial newspaper. What was it doing there? The woman, sitting on the slope of a long hill, had her back toward the Worcestershire beacon, and was looking to the south, over a lovely expanse of country. A small red-roofed city, with its cathedral peaks, folded into the hollow of a hill; a shining reach of river, with a bridge over it; walnut woods, hop-gardens, and remote points of rocky blue cliffs; and then another town, with spires piercing through the haze-like smoke in which it slept, and to which the sun had given a golden show of glory, that made it seem to hang low, roofing the place like yellow thatch, or a suspended crown.

The *Suffolk Chronicle* had come a long way — had been sent, in fact, to the vicar's wife, who was a Suffolk woman; from her the curate had begged some tea and sugar for his poor *protégée*, and she had given them wrapped in it. It was now doing duty again as a wrapper, but though the air had in part loosened it, there were creases and folds so that the news (if any had been awake to read it) was only visible here and there. A certain fishmonger, whose name was hidden, advertised his ware. The parishioners of St. Matthew's had presented their vicar with — what did not appear.

After that came a notice —

"If this should meet the eye of Hannah Dill —"

As these words were set free, a little portion of the bread became visible also, and a robin, emboldened by long silence, sprang upon the paper and weighed it down. He only stole one crumb and flew off, when up floated the paper again. "If this should meet the eye" — then a fuller waft of air shook the crumpled lines, and if any one had looked, it would have been at this — "If this should meet the eye of Hannah Dill . . . hear of something to her advantage. This is the fourth time of advertising."

It did not meet the eye of any one. But just then, with a sudden start and tremor, the baby turned and

cried, and the exhausted mother woke, ravenous with hunger and cramped with the long restraint of her attitude.

It was high noon, and very hot. While she suckled her infant, she began with hollow eyes to open her parcel, and divide its contents with her elder child, who, rosy and smiling, now sat up, and held out dimpled hands, expectant of a share.

The child had never felt the gnawings of hunger; the mother had been familiar with them of late. She took as much for herself as she dared, then folded up the small remainder, and thrust it under some dock-leaves out of sight, lest she should be tempted to eat more, and leave nothing for the supper that she knew not where to procure.

She did not feel rested; a sense of her position seemed to fall upon her like a blow. Where should she go? what should she do? She had been on her way down to Plymouth when her trouble had come upon her. There had been some wild fancy in her mind that she and the other poor mothers and wives of convicts would stand on the shore as they embarked, and take leave of them and see them sail.

She was not so free, in truth, of this wretched husband as she seemed; she had indulged strange notions as to her duty towards him. He would think it hard if she did not come, and bring him such comforts as she could beg or buy for him. Some despairing questions asked of such women as knew of these matters had let her know that the police would not suffer this, that the government would not hear of that. Yet what he might be thinking of her was frequently in her thoughts. He had deserted her and not let her know of his whereabouts for some time, but no sooner had he got himself into serious trouble, than he had contrived to have her informed of it. It must have hurt him, surely, never to have seen her anxious face in the court during his trial. Did he think she would not appear because she was ashamed of him?

A step coming on, and presently the curate standing before her.

She had her baby at her breast, and as she gently drew the flimsy shawl over its little head, he lifted his hat and made her a bow. It was not the sort of greeting a very poor mother, a probable tramp, might have expected, but she understood it; she knew it as the instinctive reverence of his young manhood for her occupation. There was something in the gentlemanhood and sympathy of this curate that was inexpressively comforting to her, but now the contrast between him and her wretched husband forced itself on her with miserable force, and the tears fell fast over her thin hands.

She could not speak or at first think, but shortly she recovered herself and dried her eyes, and saw the curate seated on the grass before the opening of the tent-like bower. He was perfectly silent, not looking towards her, and he showed no wish to speak.

Oh, what a sigh! She herself could not have sighed more deeply. Then, but not without hesitation, he began to talk — to tell her, with all gentleness, that since she had so little in this world, he was the more fain to see her endowed with a sacred hope; and shortly, to her great surprise, though he spoke with such consideration — it might almost be said with such respect — she perceived that he took for granted she was not a married woman.

She lifted up her head, startled. "Yes, sir, I know we're all sinners," she exclaimed a little proudly; "we none of us have anything to boast of."

"No."

"And as you said, sir, 'our sins do find us out.' But, sir — "

"Yes, my poor friend."

"I do thank my God for His Divine gift of a Saviour (you put it beautiful). I've often thought of it, since I sank so low. But, sir" — spreading forth her left hand to his view — "a true church parson like you put on that ring. I have a husband, and if I didn't fear God I should say, worse luck."

"My poor friend, I earnestly beg your pardon."

"For I can never get free. I was warned — oh, I was warned. It's not a sin, sir, that weighs me down; it s a mistake I made — my great mistake."

"Indeed," he answered, in a tone of the deepest sympathy.

"Oh, my poor husband! My mistake! I must bear it; there's nothing can rid me of it — nothing."

"No," answered the curate; and he sighed again. "Divine Love came down to take on itself our sins, but there is no Saviour to do the like for our mistakes."

She looked up. It must have been a sharp pang of pity that could have imparted such a tone to his voice. It could not be all pity, she thought. No, he too must have made a mistake.

So seldom is true fellow-feeling found, that when it is really present, it almost always deceives. It had done so then. Her first thought was never forgotten, and it influenced her so long as that conversation remained engraven in her mind.

Perhaps in her fine, though homely face, he saw the sudden change of expression which answered to this thought; he may have even perceived what it meant. But what need to explain himself to this stranger, this almost beggar! He turned away his face instead, and she noticed again what she had seen before, that, young as he was, he had one lock of perfectly white hair among the brown.

He stood a moment silent, then he took occasion to bring the conversation round to a point from whence he could draw his moral. Experts in teaching easily do this sort of thing, and the poor commonly expect it of them.

"If our sins were forgiven, our mistakes need not break our hearts. Nature was hard upon us, for their sake. She did not forgive them, and she could not forget. God did not interfere with her. But to us He would give a heart that should be the better for her discipline; even they should be among the 'all things' that shall work together for our good."

CHAPTER II.

"IF this should meet the eye of Hannah Dill, whose maiden name was Goodrich, and who was born in the parish of St. Peter, Ipswich, she is desired to apply (by letter only) to H. G., Blank Court, High Holborn (she knows the number), and she will hear of something to her advantage. This advertisement appears to-day for the fourth time."

The curate gone; the woman silent in her bower, with wide-open eyes full of amazement and fear.

The *Suffolk Chronicle* had done its work at last.

She had sunk very low; that, alas! is common enough. The uncommon thing is the rising again.

"I fare to feel as if I must eat another piece," the poor nursing mother had said, for she was hungry again; and she looked wistfully at her parcel under the roofing dock-leaves.

The curate had left her with the gift of a shilling; moreover, he had promised to arrange with a carrier, who was to pass by the hop-garden about three o'clock, to take her and her babes as far as the town, in his cart. For in that scattered hamlet, as he explained, he knew of no one who could lodge her.

What a slender hold she had on the care and thought of the world! None at all on its heart. She heard what little kindness it held for her only from the mouth of this one man. The pledge of it with which his hand had met hers was that one bit of silver, and the sigh with which he had murmured that he wished it was more.

She could not thank him, for little as he was to her, he was all; and he was sending her away.

She meant to go: what else could she do? She could not walk far; she could not stay all night in the hop-garden. She possessed little more than the cost of two nights' lodging. When should she be strong enough to earn a maintenance for herself and her infants?

"I fare so hungry," she repeated. She drew her parcel from under the leaves, and there was her own name, staring her in the face. *If this should meet the eye of Hannah Dill.*

She had been so long unused to good fortune, that at first she could see no promise in this. Suspicions had been cast upon her. The magistrates had said her husband must have had accomplices. Could this be a trap? But why, if so, should they advertise for her in Ipswich? No, this advertisement was put in by her uncle the pawnbroker, the great man of the family, known to be "well to do," said to be rich. He had long cast off her mother, and all his relations, because they plagued him so for money. He had been fond of her in her childhood, but when she married had gone out of his way to let her know that he meant to have no more to do with her. It was only when she heard this that she supposed he might have hitherto intended some kindness to her.

She had not been to Ipswich for several years. Her uncle did not know it; and the date of the newspaper was earlier than that of her husband's trial.

This was no trap, this was real. She read again and again — took courage; but still wary, still unused to joy, weighed it and weighed it, between hope and fear, till hope suddenly got the upper hand, and she acted upon it at once. She opened wide her parcel, and with a little help from her baby-girl, ate up all that remained in it, then and there.

A daring venture! but when she began to waver again and doubt, the sight of that empty paper was an evidence to her of how sure she had felt when she made it.

It helped the joy of certainty to recur, and she felt so

much the better for this and for the good meal, that when the carrier saw her seated on the step of the stile, and her little one playing by her with some flowers, he could hardly believe she was the poor creature whom he had been told to look out for.

Oh! the bliss of lying in a golden shade, under the tawny tilt of that wagon, as it slowly moved along; of hearing the carrier's whistle while he trudged beside it; of conning the leaf of the newspaper, with oft-repeated scrutiny; then looking out over the long blue hills, while they melted softly into air, and feeling as if all the world, with herself, was conscious of some great reprieve.

Soon they halted at a little wayside inn, half smothered in walnut trees, and while the carrier's horse leaned over a long water-trough, she bought some milk, and the hostess came out to look at her baby, and compare its age and weight with her own. "It thrives," she observed.

"Yes, thank God," answered the Ipswich mother, "that do."

"And so you're going on to the town?"

"And further! I am going to a relation that have written for me from London."

"My way lies toward London," observed the old carrier, when they had started again.

Hannah Dill found that she should be twelve miles nearer to London if she went with the carrier to his destination, than if she stopped at the town. She agreed to pay the small sum he asked, in addition to what her kind friend the curate had already given him, and, after stopping at a little hostelry outside the town to have her tea, set off again in the cool of the evening, and went on with the old man and a market woman.

Up and down the long hills they moved till the crescent moon rose, and then till it grew dark and the great horn-lantern was lighted, and the old man carried it, sometimes flashing its light on his horse, sometimes on the green hedges, and into fields, whose crops they could guess only by the smell of clover, or fresh-cut

hay, or beans that loaded the warm night-air; anon, on whitewashed cottages, whose inhabitants had long been asleep, and again upon the faces of great cliff-like rocks, where cuttings had been made for the road into the steep hills, and where strange curly ammonites and peaked shells and ancient bones high up showed themselves for an instant in the moving disk of light that rose and sank as the lantern swayed in the carrier's hand.

Strange sights these; and curious now and then to see it flash on the bronzed face of some wayfaring man, passing from the dark into the dark, with the customary "Good night."

It was eleven o'clock when they reached the hostelry, and Mrs. Dill got down with her two sleeping infants. She felt that this had been a strangely long day, but that she was refreshed by food and hope and rest.

In the mean time the old man who had advertised for her had long given her up. He had soon taken to a sick bed, and for a while had asked if Hannah had written — if Hannah was come. Then he ceased to ask, but sometimes bemoaned her absence; and then he forgot her, and all the concerns of this life, and asked no more.

The morning after her arrival at the hostelry, Mrs. Dill wrote to her uncle, and as soon as possible afterwards received the money needful for her journey. The letter was not in her uncle's handwriting, and said nothing about him. It was curt, and, without any kind words, desired her to be as quick as she could.

Between twenty and thirty years ago there were not so many railways in the west of England that one could count on getting to London in one day. Mrs. Dill was thirty miles from the nearest railway station. She reached it by the aid of another carrier's cart, and stood at her uncle's door about five o'clock the following afternoon.

She had never been in London before. The glaring white pavements and close heat oppressed her, while the swarms of people and of vehicles, the noise and

hurry, made her tremble with a sense of danger for herself and her children. But she had not a shilling left, find her uncle she must; and she still asked her way and pressed on, till at last she reached a shabby house in a dusky court, and, overcome with fatigue and excitement, rang the bell. A woman, dressed in new mourning, presently came to the door, and seeing her shabby, woe-begone appearance, and her two children, took her for a beggar, and made this remarkable announcement, "No, we never give anything away in charity," and was proceeding to shut the door in her face, when she exclaimed, "Wait a minute; I am come to see Mr. Goodrich. I'm his niece; you'll show me in, if you please."

"Bless my heart!" exclaimed the woman, with an irrepressible smile, "if here ain't another on 'em;" and then she became suddenly grave again, and answered coldly, "You're too late, young woman. You may come in, if you choose, and see *all the others*, but you will not see Mr. Goodrich; he was buried yesterday."

A sharp sense of misery and disaster, a sudden cry to the woman, "Oh, my babe! don't let that fall," then an eddy of blackness swirling over all things, and Hannah Dill fainted away.

After that, her first sensation was that her little girl was crying, and next that several other voices made a din about her — voices that long ago she seemed to have known, voices that made her think of Ipswich. In the midst of it all, and while still she could not move or open her eyes, a commanding voice quelled the others. "Either be silent and stand back, or at once leave the room."

With a sharp sigh she presently got her eyes open, and saw dimly several people, but before them stood a gentleman, who spoke at once. "You are better. No need to raise your head. Your name?"

"Mrs. Dill."

The assembly received this announcement with an audible groan.

"There was an advertisement," she proceeded faintly,

"in the *Suffolk Chronicle*," and she tried to fumble for the paper.

"Thank you. We know all about that. There are several copies of the *Suffolk Chronicle* here."

Something scornful in the voice helped her to rouse herself; and at the same time a murmur of congratulation floated round the room. Somebody ventured to congratulate *Mr. Bartlett*. "You're not the gentleman, sir, to be so easy taken in. Hannah Dill, indeed! Is it likely?"

"Not at all likely," answered the commanding voice; "but let her alone for the present."

"Where's my babe? where's my child?" she exclaimed, trying again to raise herself, and failing.

"Close at hand," answered the same voice, and a glass of wine was held to her lips; after drinking which she sat up, and observed that she was in a small wainscoted parlor, accommodated on a horsehair sofa. Several people were in the room; for the moment they seemed to float before her; but presently she gathered strength, and then, as they settled down into their places, her attention was attracted almost at once by a little stout old woman, with eyes like black beads, a long nose, and a curled "front" of brown hair. She was dressed in neat mourning, and no sooner met the full gaze of the tall, gaunt young woman, than she slipped into the background; whereupon the gentleman whom they had called Mr. Bartlett looked surprised, and requested her to come forward, which she did, looking both irate and abashed.

Still Mrs. Dill looked at her. "You'll excuse me, ma'am. It's many years since I saw my aunt Maria — Mrs. Storer; and folks alter strangely. I don't wonder, either, that any one should forget me, not expecting to see me dressed so as I am. You are the very moral of what my dear mother was before she died. Why, dear me, ma'am, you *are* my aunt Maria! I'm your sister Susan's daughter, aunt. I'm Hannah Goodrich."

"Tcha!" said the old lady, "it's no such thing; you're not a bit like her. What did you expect you were going to do here, deceiving of us?"

"It don't much signify what I expected," she answered, bursting into tears; but she had looked round the room first, and was quick to perceive at once how unwelcome she was there. "It don't much signify what I expected; I shall not have it now. He's gone that meant to be a good friend to me! You have no call to be so envious. He's past doing me any kindness; and I was more in need of it than you are."

Here followed a scene which the one silent spectator looked on at with equal surprise, interest, and attention; a scene of excitement, rage, and recrimination, during which all the old heart-burnings and delinquencies of the Goodrich family were raked up, and argued over again. Two aunts and two uncles were challenged by Hannah Dill, in whose teeth it was forthwith flung that her husband was a convict, and that this was already known all over Ipswich, and that if the dear departed had only known it too, he never would have suffered her to enter his door; and who, in a passion of tears, replied by upbraidings of their unkindness in suffering their own sister, in spite of her humble entreaties for help, to die in receipt of parish pay, and be buried with a pauper's funeral; and then, after this short outbreak of indignation and outraged feeling, partly at their refusal to recognize her, and then, when they did, at their cruel mention of her wretched husband, being completely quelled by numbers, and cured of her faintness by passionate excitement, snatched up her baby in her trembling arms, and seizing her other child by the hand, turned her back on them all, and, without any words of farewell, moved hastily towards the door.

But that gentleman, still looking on, was standing before it, leaning against the lintel. "Where are you going, Mrs. Dill?" he now asked, with slow composure.

"I don't know," she answered, with a choking sob. "I have nowhere to go to. I've come to-day and yesterday all the way from beyond Glastonbury, to see my poor uncle. But I'm not wanted; it's no use my stopping now."

"Oh! the person I wrote to, then? I think you are

rather in a hurry," he answered, with his calm, slow smile.

Here the two aunts said it was a shame, and they had never been used to convicts' wives in the family. She quivered all over, and, with entreating eyes, appealed to him to let her be gone. But he, taking no notice, proceeded calmly —

"Your uncle, you know, might have left you something; you don't seem to think of that, Mrs. Dill."

To this speech, still trembling with excitement and passion, she made a remarkable answer.

"It's no use at all what he might have said I was to have; they would divide it amongst themselves just the same — I know they would! They are that grasping and contemptuous, that they would never let me touch a thing!"

In the mean time, the aunts and uncles were all appealing to Mr. Bartlett, and saying it was a shame.

"So it may be," he answered, coldly, "for anything I care. There is no doubt, then, that this is Hannah Dill. You had better sit down, Mrs. Dill."

Mrs. Dill, having received this command, wept, but obeyed; and, observing the silence that had fallen on the company, felt her excitement suddenly give way to shame at the passionate language into which she had been betrayed. Here she was obliged to face everybody, and all eyes were upon her.

"I'm sure I humbly beg your pardon, uncles and aunts," she cried, drying her eyes, with another sob.

"Mrs. Dill," continued the lawyer, "have I your attention?"

"Sir?"

"I am the lawyer who made your uncle's will. This being the day succeeding his funeral, I have just been reading it here, according to his directions."

"Indeed, sir."

"There it lies upon the table. You will please to make yourself at home here. Everything is yours."

"Mine?" with a sharp cry of amazement.

"Yours."

To say that on the instant Mrs. Dill was pleased or proud, would be quite a mistake. Compunction and confusion strove in her mind, with doubt as to whether the family would let her take what had been given her, and utter abasement at her position as a convict's wife tied her tongue. She gazed helplessly at the lawyer, who, having taken a pair of new gloves from his pocket and deliberately put them on, was now buttoning them one after the other, as if they were of more consequence than her inheritance.

So they were to him.

It may have been, perhaps, that he saw her bewilderment as she gazed at them, that he put his hands behind him and said, with slow composure, "Mrs. Dill, I have some advice to give you, in the presence of these good people."

Having said this, he presently took up the will and put it in his pocket.

"Yes, sir," she answered, the sense of his words reaching her at last; and she gathered her first feelings of possession from the deep silence around her, and from his speaking to her only.

"I advise you to make no promises whatever, and, in fact, utterly to decline any sort of discussion on business matters, till after you have seen me to-morrow morning."

Hannah Dill gazed at him, and the room seemed to be full of sighs; there was not a person present that had not heaved one.

When they reached the lawyer's ears, he said, with rather more sharpness in his tone than he had used before, "I may hope, I suppose, that I have your attention, Mrs. Dill?"

"Yes, sir," she replied.

"And that you will attend to my advice, and make no promises till after you have seen me to-morrow morning."

The room was full of sighs again.

"You promise?"

"Yes, sir," she repeated, "I do."

Thereupon, having done his duty, he promptly retired, but, as if struck by an after-thought, had scarcely closed the door when he opened it again, and beckoned her out with his finger.

"Have you any money?" he whispered kindly.

"Only a few half-pence, sir."

"You would like to borrow this, then," he said, and he put two sovereigns in her hand; whereupon, feeling more relieved every instant, she returned, and, as is often the case on a great occasion, her first words were very simple and commonplace.

She looked round; no eyes met hers. It was evident that she was mistress of the situation. "Aunts and uncles," she said, in a deprecating tone, and after an awkward pause, "if you're agreeable to it, let's have our tea."

By this time the aunt who had not hitherto spoken had got the baby in her arms. The other, seeing that the matter was inevitable, constituted herself spokeswoman for the party, and said, in a way half grumbling, half ashamed —

"Well, Hannah, I for one am willing to forgive and forget; and there's a gel downstairs you might send out for anything you wanted — muffins, a relish, or what not."

"Or spirits," put in one of the uncles; "or, in short, anything as you might think well to hev."

Mrs. Dill sent out for new bread, fresh butter, plenty of muffins, green tea, loaf sugar, sausages, ham to fry, a bottle of gin, and a quart of milk.

When the meal was ready, the "gel" was trusted with the baby, and took it downstairs, while they all sat down and did it full justice; but to nobody were the steaming sausages and delightful cups of hot strong tea so welcome as to Hannah Dill herself, for she had eaten nothing that day but a dry crust of bread, which her little girl, after a sufficient meal, had daintily declined, so short had she been of money till those two sovereigns, the first pledges of prosperity, touched her honest hand.

She did not preside, would not have presumed to do so. One aunt served the ham and sausages, another poured out the tea, her uncles kept the bottle of gin under their special superintendence, and all was silent satisfaction, if not harmony, till the company could eat and drink no more.

CHAPTER III.

TIME, ten o'clock in the morning after this tea drinking.

Scene, the parlor before mentioned, and Mrs. Dill seated in it quite alone.

Her baby, once more in charge of the "gel," was down in the kitchen, staring just as contentedly at its dingy ceiling as she had done some days before at the celestial azure that showed between the leaves of the hop-bines. Her little girl having found a dead black-beetle, was putting it to bed in a duster, with just as much pleasure as she had received beforetime from the flowers.

Mrs. Dill had borrowed a black gown, and a very large flat black brooch, from the taller of her two aunts, and was awaiting the lawyer's visit.

A lanky sunbeam, having got down between two opposite chimneys, seemed to be pointing out to her country eyes how dirty London was, what nests of dust there were in the corners of the window-panes, and how, wherever there was a crack in the plaster or the wainscot, blacks were attracted towards it, and marked its course by a winding line, that reminded her, as it has done so many other people, of a river traced upon a map. There was a garniture of pipes round the small looking-glass; ill-matched tumblers, standing on a card-table, flanked the now almost empty bottle of gin. But yet this was a parlor, and her sensations towards it, though made restless by suspense, were on the whole pleasure and pride.

And now Mr. Bartlett appeared, and took the will

from his pocket, which he read to her with all gravity, while she sat in state opposite.

It treated of certain shares in the Brighton Railway, of a particular messuage or tenement, of two fields bought of Richard Prosper, the butcher of Stoke, near Ipswich, and then, in the midst of a good deal of jargon concerning property real and personal, came the name of Hannah Dill, whose maiden name was Goodrich, and who was to have and to hold this same messuage or tenement, with other his said property real and personal, during the term of her natural life, and if she survived her husband, to have power to will it away.

Here followed a codicil.

When Mr. Bartlett had read the will and the codicil from beginning to end, he got up and stood on the rug. She then rose also. How could she think of sitting unless he did?

He perceived this, and also that she was very little the wiser for what she had heard.

"The name of the executor, you perceive, is Gordon. He is a very respectable tradesman, but he is ill just now — not able to appear."

Still silence.

I dare say the codicil puzzles you. Mr. Goodrich added that himself. His real property having proved troublesome and a losing concern to him, the executor is at liberty to sell it, provided it is forthwith reinvested, or laid out prudently. He also expressly permits that a portion be laid out in buying a business, or in stocking a shop."

Then he sat down again, and so did she, and gathered courage to ask a question. "Might she take the liberty to inquire how much a week the things he had been good enough to read about would bring in?"

"How much a week — how much — a — week?" he repeated slowly, as he took out a pencil. "The income you should derive from this property," he said, adding the various items together, "is as near as may be one hundred and eighty pounds a year; that is about three pounds a week, you know."

Though she had been in such poverty, and this was riches to her, she betrayed no vulgar elation.

"Indeed, sir. Thank you. Is that money mine, to do as I like with?"

"Well, yes; for though you are a married woman, your husband cannot interfere with you at present."

"No, sir," she answered faintly. "He was sentenced, poor fellow, for fourteen years, and I know now that he is in the convict prison at Dartmoor. He is most likely not to leave the country, as I had thought; he is to work there at his trade."

"You know, of course, that if he behaves well, he will be allowed to come out in eleven or twelve years with a ticket of leave."

"Yes, sir; and that he will be allowed to write to me, and I to him, twice a year. I heard so from his brother, Jacob Dill, who felt sure that, in time, I should hear of that advertisement, and come. So he wrote here accordingly. They gave me the letter last night. I suppose, sir, that, when my poor husband comes out, he will have just as much right to the money, and to his children and to me, as if he had never got himself into trouble?"

"Certainly he will; nothing but a sentence for life can dissolve the marriage contract. You took him for worse as well as for better."

"I know, sir. Am I responsible to him then, do you think, for what I do with the money while he is under his sentence?"

"No, Mrs. Dill; it cannot be said that you are."

Here, being a restless man, Mr. Bartlett forgot himself, rose, and stood on the rug again. Mrs. Dill took occasion to rise also.

"About those relations of yours? I suppose you took my advice?"

"I did as well as I could," she answered, with apologetic respect.

Here he gravely seated himself, and she followed suit.

"As well as you could?" he repeated.

"Sir, they made the remark so many times, that it

seemed very hard and very unnatural — in short, they were that low about the will — "

"Well, Mrs. Dill?"

"That at last I said, if you were quite agreeable, I would endeavor to come to some sort of agreement with them. If you were quite agreeable, sir," she repeated, seeing him knit his brow. "On consideration of which," she went on, "they all promised faithfully that they would go away. And they thought it would be as well that they should be out of the house till dinner-time, that I might be wholly free to talk it over with you."

"Your object in coming to an agreement, as you call it, would simply be in order to get rid of them."

"Well — yes, sir."

"Mrs. Dill, if once you begin to pay your relations to go, they will return and return, to be paid again. I should send them all to the rightabout, if I were you. They have enough. They all get a decent living."

"Oh, you simpleton!" was his thought; "you will be fleeced of every shilling before you are a year older."

"You must think of your young children," he remarked, "and their almost worse than fatherless state. They have no one but yourself to look to."

"Yes, I feel that, sir."

"And, then, something surely is due to your uncle's wish, the old man's wish who earned this property, and has deliberately chosen to leave it to you."

"And I thought of that too. But it's mine now, and I fare to feel hurt by their reproaches. If it was only a trifle, my eldest uncle said; and so did his son, my cousin. I said perhaps Mr. Bartlett would not allow me to — "

"To give any of the income away?" he asked, when she hesitated. "I could not prevent it, nor Mr. Gordon either."

"So they said, sir," she replied, with an ingenuous sigh of regret. "They said, 'Hannah, if you chose to take and chuck it all in the Thames, they could not prevent it.'"

"Quite true."

Then she tried to explain to him her distress at having to do anything mean. She thought the old man had left his property to her more to spite his brothers and sisters than out of any love to herself. She could not bear to hear those nearer to him speak so hardly of the dead; she would buy his memory into better repute by making some sacrifice of his goods.

She had, as he observed, notions of honor and right not common in her class, but also she was simple in some other matters to a degree not common in any class. She had that temperament which, with one touch more of the divine in it than others, has also one touch more of the child. The child in her nature was destined never to grow up, as the yearning idea was too high ever to be satisfied.

"You seem very much afraid of your aunts and uncles," he said. "But let me tell you one thing for your comfort: the law will not permit you to make away with any of the principal; you can only deal with the income."

"That was what they made me promise to ask; they seemed to be afraid it was the case."

"As long as your husband is living you can only touch the income."

"Still, for the next ten or eleven years I could give them what I pleased out of the income."

"What *they* pleased, I think you mean! You could. Did they name any particular sum that would satisfy them?"

"Why, sir, there are five of them. If I kept half for myself till such time as poor Dill came home, the other half wouldn't be much divided among them; but I reckoned, by what they let fall, it would satisfy them if it was paid regular."

Here Mr. Bartlett got up once more, and stood cogitating by the window. She was a fool; but he did not despise, for he understood her.

He remained a few minutes turning over in his mind, between pity and amusement, what to do for her. It

was no business of his, as he assured himself, but yet he meant to take it in hand. A sudden thought seemed to strike him just as a cab passed the window. He tapped and stopped it.

"These *harpies* are gone out, you say. Where are your children?"

"Downstairs, sir."

"I have a note to write. Suppose you fetch them up, and come back to me with your bonnet on."

Her bonnet was so shabby! She knew not whether to think most of it, or of Mr. Samuel Weller, who went to Doctors' Commons to prove a will. Was Mr. Bartlett going to take her there?

Mr. Bartlett was in the passage when she appeared with her children. He had a note in his hand, the ink of which was not dry. He had already opened the street door; he moved to her to enter the cab, and straightway shut her in. "I have told the man where to drive," he said. "The direction is on the note also;" and before she had recovered from her astonishment, she had left her late uncle's house never to enter it again.

It may be as well to draw a veil over the scene that ensued, when her aunts and uncles having returned, and waited dinner for her a reasonable time, began to suspect that she had escaped them. To obtain the half of everything, was the very least they had counted on. Some of them remained within, in case she should return; others went to Mr. Bartlett's office. Mr. Bartlett, they were informed, was engaged, and could not possibly see them, but they learned from his clerk that no person resembling Hannah Dill had called there that day.

The note that Mr. Bartlett had put into Mrs. Dill's hand was addressed, "Mrs. George Bartlett." Its contents may as well be given here.

"Dear Love, — You remember the scene I was describing to you last night? This is the heroine of it!

"Her relations have arranged a plan for chousing her out of her money; and she is so *chousable*, that if left

with them another day, she will be committed to it irretrievably. So, unknown to herself, I have caused her to run away from them. Tell her so, and tell her I say, that in justice to herself and her children, she must not decide to give anything to these people while under the constant pressure of their importunity.

"I suppose, love, she can dine in the nursery? And then I want you, as soon as possible after, to let nurse take her in the omnibus up the new road to old Mrs. Prentice, who can lodge her, or recommend her to somebody who can. Tell her to keep herself perfectly quiet till she hears from us.

"Thine, G. B."

Mrs. Dill had been driven to Mr. Bartlett's house, and, in a high state of astonishment and perplexity, was waiting in a handsome dining-room, and keeping her children quiet with some difficulty, when a plump, pleasant-looking young woman came in, with the note open in her hand, and a face full of amusement and curiosity.

Mrs. Dill exclaimed that she hoped there was no mistake. And the lady answered cordially, "No mistake at all. I am Mrs. George Bartlett. I could not come down sooner; I was nursing my baby. Yours looks very young."

"Only sixteen days, ma'am; and I believe that's hungry."

"Poor little lamb!" said the other mother, and paused an instant, as if she hardly knew how to go on; then glancing at the note again, and catching an idea from it, she said, with a smile of amusement, "Well, suppose you come up to the nursery, and nurse it there, and see my baby. But he is a great big fellow, eight months old. Come, I will lead your little girl."

The baby by this time was so *fractious*, that Mrs. Dill, in spite of her surprise, was very glad of any proposal which promised to allow of her satisfying its little requirements.

"The children are gone out for their walk," observed Mrs. Bartlett, as they entered a light, roomy nursery.

"Take their rocking-chair, and make yourself at home."

Then, as soon as the baby was quiet and happy, and little Miss Dill had been propitiated with a sponge rusk and a rag doll, Mrs. Bartlett said, "And so my husband has made you run away from your relations?"

"Ma'am!" exclaimed Mrs. Dill, "I do assure you I shouldn't think of such a thing."

"He says so," repeated Mrs. Bartlett, much enjoying her task.

"I never thought of such a thing!" the other exclaimed again.

"What did you think you were doing, then, when you got into the cab? Why did you do it?"

"Why, ma'am, because Mr. Bartlett told me."

Mrs. Bartlett now, at some length, explained the true state of the case, and soon observed that to know she was freed from these relations, and had got her future in her own hands, was a most welcome thought to Mrs. Dill. Her gratitude was fervent, but she could not help smiling while she answered the questions of her hostess as to what had passed.

"I wonder you did not at least ask Mr. Bartlett where you were going."

"Oh, ma'am, Mr. Bartlett is such a commanding gentleman! I couldn't take the liberty."

Mrs. Bartlett laughed. On reflection she laughed again. "Well, I suppose George has rather a commanding manner with strangers," was her thought. "But, dear me! who would expect him to be obeyed and no questions asked!"

Mr. Bartlett was his wife's humble servant. He was what is sometimes called an "out-sized man," large-handed, heavy-footed, imposing in appearance, commanding in voice and gesture; a great, dark, plain, downright, upright, kind-hearted personage.

It is said that in a thoroughly strong and good government the weight of the governing hand is least felt. Mr. Bartlett was ruled with such utter ease and skill that he thought he was free.

In two hours' time Mrs. Dill had entered her lodgings at Pentonville, and was divesting herself of her aunt's gown and brooch, which, to prevent discovery, were to be returned by the Parcels Delivery Company.

Having no gown, she was obliged to stay indoors till a dressmaker could finish one for her. The shop-windows were not then, as now, full of "costumes" ready-made. Mrs. Dill and the nurse did some shopping on their way, and then left alone with her babes, after the latter had withdrawn, she sat down to think over the astonishing events of the last twenty-four hours.

And the long journey, and the excitement she had since gone through, began to tell upon her, and for several days she was glad to lie quietly on her bed, finding it enough to wonder at and be thankful for that she could procure whatever she wanted, and civility too. For, as the landlady would sometimes remark to her, "A fat trouble, ma'am, is much better than a lean trouble; and however bad you feel, you know you've only to put your hand in your pocket, and send me out to buy the dinner."

Mrs. Dill soon constituted herself Mr. Bartlett's client, and taking, by his advice, or rather by his orders, several days to think the matter over, conveyed to him her deliberate wish that he would keep for her one hundred and fifty pounds a year, and divide the remainder of the income, with the furniture and clothes left by her deceased uncle, equally among his brothers and sisters.

Mr. Bartlett and the executor grumbled over this decision, but they carried it out, and of their own accord obtained from each of the recipients a written promise never again to molest Hannah Dill in the possession of her property, and never at any future time to apply to the said Hannah Dill for money, on any pretence whatever.

They were all satisfied, especially Hannah Dill, who read the signed paper, and heard that all her relations were gone back to Suffolk, with almost incredulous joy

Poor woman, she was now safe for a while from the unkindness of her husband. She began to try hard to forgive him, being helped by the consciousness that he could not now be offending against her. Her natural jealousy as a wife was appeased; she pitied him. He would surely now become a better man. In about five months he would have leave to communicate by letter with her. He should hear of her good fortune, and for the sake of this promise of secured future comforts, if not for her sake, surely he would reform.

She dreaded him sorely; but what hope was there for her, excepting in thus hoping the best for him? This crime had been hateful to her, for the house he had robbed was that of her own dear lady, and there could be no doubt that he had obtained the knowledge which made this easy during the time when he had come courting there to her.

She had been somewhat of a wanderer. Born at Ipswich, she had moved with the family of her lady to Bristol; but Uzziah Dill belonged to Chester, and soon after her marriage with him, he had returned there on a promise of work, and there they had lived till he went off with the woman for whose sake he had for some time neglected her.

She was very weak and ill all that winter; she had gone through so much misery, that she could not soon recover. But she had the solace of her children, and having plenty of money and time, she employed herself mainly in making an abundant supply of comfortable and handsome clothing for them.

She went now and then to see Mrs. Bartlett, and observed how her children were dressed. "Mine have a right to the best," was her thought; "and, bless them, they shall have it, and the best of wholesome eating, too."

Hannah Dill was a tall young woman, with a large frame, and dark hair and eyes. Her children were two delicate little fairies, flaxen-haired and blue-eyed, with all the pensive beauty of their father, but with little promise of strength and vigor.

When she knew that it was almost time for her husband to write to her, she wrote to his brother, Jacob Dill, and gave him her address. She little thought this would bring the whole tribe of the Dills upon her; she knew that they had not money enough to come, and they had been so unfriendly to her, that she supposed they would be ashamed to apply to her for money, even by letter.

She was quite mistaken, and soon found herself worse off with them than she had been with the Goodriches.

On the evening of the third day old Mrs. Dill appeared and established herself in Hannah Dill's lodgings, having borrowed the money for her journey, and expecting her daughter-in-law to return it forthwith. She brought her youngest girl with her, and said she would be very handy for taking care of the children.

Hannah Dill was at that time so restless with expectation, that she was even less able than usual to cope with these encroaching spirits. Everything seemed to depend on her husband's first letter. Was he penitent? Was he hardened? How would he write, and what should she reply?

It is probable that she would have succumbed, and perhaps have even agreed to receive Uzziah's drunken old father, but for a blow that she was not prepared for, and that hurt her more sorely than all that had gone before.

Jacob Dill wrote, for he said he was ashamed to show her his face. He was the only one of the Dills that had a spark of spirit or good feeling. It was better she should know it, he wrote. Uzziah had written, had written the first day that he was allowed. Of course he had not heard, when he did it, of his wife's having got the money. "You see, Hannah, they are only allowed to write to their wives, or their families if they have no wife. He told the governor he had a wife; and I am sorry to let it out to you, for I know you'll be hurt, but he wrote to *her*. Why, she was with him at his trial, and called Mrs. Dill and all; and he told her how he wanted to hear on her, and asked if her baby were born, and she were to write back as though she was his wife.

It was not at all sure as he should be long at Dartmoor; he might get sent over the sea. And, oh! would she write off directly? It was a shame, but he never mentioned you at all."

What people have been taught how to do, they should be able to do. Hannah Dill ran away again.

Old Mrs. Dill had, now she had come to London, two ambitions. She wanted to see the Crystal Palace, and also to see Smithfield.

She accomplished the last while her daughter-in-law, cold as a stone after this blow, sat shivering in silence by the fire. She accomplished the second a few days after, and took her daughter. When the poor wife heard the door shut after her, and knew that she would be away for hours, she lifted up her face, that was full of moody and brooding thought, asked the landlady to watch her children, and went out. She came back in a cab, with three large boxes; and, some hours after, then left the house again, with those same boxes and her children, and a hearty hug from the landlady, whose claims she more than satisfied.

When old Mrs. Dill came back, she found, instead of her daughter-in-law, certain articles of clothing laid out for her acceptance — a brown paper parcel, containing money enough to take her and her daughter home, and a letter, setting forth that her daughter-in-law had left London for good, and she would hear from her and see her no more.

CHAPTER IV.

GREAT schemes may be reasoned out, and great sacrifices already made in thought. While leaning her face on her hand, a heart-sick woman sits brooding, with her feet on the fender.

Uzziah Dill's wife had tried hard to forgive him, and, while at peace in present freedom, had persuaded herself that she need not tremble, thinking of the day that would bring her into his presence and under his dominion again.

Uzziah Dill's wife now gave him up for good and all. She suffered in so doing from no sense of wrong, any more than of unkindness towards him. Clearly he did not want her, and he had sinned against her in that one only way which made her, by all law, divine and human, free to depart and be loosed from him for ever.

But then she wanted to save her children, not only from the disadvantage and disgrace of knowing that they had a convict for their father, but from that acquaintance with wickedness, evil living, and shame that they could not escape if she went into Court so soon as he was free, and laid all her wrongs open in order to obtain a divorce.

How could she save these that were her all — these, so much dearer to her than herself — the costly and consoling fruit of her great mistake? For their sake, in spite of the sorrow and fear it had wrought her, she always found it impossible to wish the past undone.

If she was, indeed, never to retrieve the mistake, could she not still so act as to take all its weight upon herself? She longed, as true love must, to shield her children from the cruel robbery of affection that she had

proved — from exposure to contaminating examples, from want and blame.

To this end, she effaced herself utterly, and left her name behind her. When she was again seen by one who knew her, she showed herself that she might learn how to deprive the vicious father of his children, to secure which she was willing to rob herself of them also.

At first, restless and wretched, she could not mature her plan, but journeyed from one little seaside place to another, never calling herself by her husband's name, but using any other, indifferently, that came into her head.

Mr. Bartlett, during those three or four months, heard frequently from Hannah Dill, and forwarded money to her as she required it. Before he got rid of the whining old mother-in-law, and the helpless young girl, he had wished many times that he had never taught her to run away.

And then there was a drunken father-in-law, who tormented him for more money, and said it was on his conscience that Hannah ought to be advertised for, and made to come back to her own husband's relations, that were so willing to look after her and the children.

Mr. Bartlett said they might advertise if they liked, and make her come back if they could. He added, in such a convincing way, that he did not care what they did, that in the end they believed him, and gave him up, as the "wrong-headedest" and "hard-heartedest" gentleman they had ever met with. They then departed.

At last, but not for some time after this, Mrs. Dill appeared one morning at Mr. Bartlett's office, sent up a note, and was straightway admitted to an interview.

It was evident that she had gone through great trouble; her eyes were hollow, and her features thin. Her children had both been ill, she told him, but she acknowledged nothing else afflictive, and after a few commonplaces of condolence from him, she broke in with —

"I came to ask your opinion, sir, about some things don't fairly understand."

"Well, Mrs. Dill, I am at your service."

"I wish, sir, to know how people came first by their surnames. I have made out, by a book of history, that we did not always have such."

"Certainly not."

"People took them, I fare to think, mainly for convenience."

"Quite true."

He then went over familiar ground with her — described how some names grew out of the trades of those first called by them, others came from the father's Christian name, others, again, from localities.

"But you do not need that I should tell you this," he broke off to say; "you have studied the subject, I find."

"Yes, sir," she answered. "Then what they took for convenience, I should say they may change for convenience."

"They very commonly do — for the sake of some property, for instance, left on that condition."

"I know it, sir. Well, it would hurt my conscience to live in a lie. If I call myself by another name than poor Dill's, do I lie? Mayn't I take a name for myself, as my fore-ancestors did?"

"That depends, I should say, partly on the motive. If you meant, by such an act, to prevent your husband from claiming you and his children when he gets free, and also to keep from him, if you can, the money that you have inherited, and to which he will have a clear right —"

Mrs. Dill's silence appeared to show that she did so intend.

"It would be every way wrong," he presently added. "It would deprive him of his wife, while, being unable to prove your death, he could not marry again."

"No, but that would be no worse for him than for me. I could never marry again, either."

"You propose to interfere with your husband's clear legal rights."

"Sir, sir!" she interrupted. "Of course a man must be expected to take the man's side. I don't re-

sent that; so it is, and always will be, just as sure as that a woman will take against a woman. But if he has behaved to me so bad and so base, that no laws — not God's, nor even man's — would give me back to him — "

"Mrs Dill, you must tell me something more."

Mrs. Dill did tell more. For the first and last time she unfolded her many wrongs, and told all. This was not a common case, and the husband had not cared to conceal either his unfaithfulness or his cruelty. She ended, with many heart-sick tears, "I never will live with him again. He may claim me, but he shall never get me. Rather than that, I'll spend every shilling of my money to get free." ("Your money!" thought Mr. Bartlett.) "I must and will save his children and mine. And that's why I want to have another name, sir; and you, having treated me almost as if I was a friend — "

"You want a friend's opinion?"

"I want to know, first, if I can be punished for doing it."

"Why, my good woman, of course not, *unless you are found out.*"

"And would you tell me, as a friend, am I living in a lie? Is it a moral wrong to take a new name?"

"I answer, as a friend, decidedly not. But it is a great risk; for your husband will be able to get your money, though it will prevent him from getting you."

"Yes, I've been to Mr. Gordon, and he said so."

"The money is, in fact, now lying in my hands. The executor did wish to sell the property, and it is to be reinvested."

"You will not let me have even half of it?"

"No, because you cannot give me a receipt that would not still leave me liable to have your husband come upon me. Mr. Gordon cannot give it to you either."

"No, sir. Mr. Gordon was saying, though, that the money might be invested in a way not generally allowed — laid out, I mean, in stocking a shop."

Mr. Bartlett here looked steadily into Hannah Dill's

clear, honest eyes. "I half expected this," he thought. "Well, Mrs. Dill?"

"He said, if I could keep a shop—"

"Yes, if you could keep a shop."

"But I said I was afraid; and if I lost the money, Dill would be so angry."

"It was to be kept under your own—I mean your husband's name."

"I never mentioned to him about going by another."

"Humph!"

"He said my husband could not object nor come on you or him afterwards, even if any money was lost; on the other hand, I might make money by trade, and that surely would not belong to Dill?"

"What did you answer?"

"I did not take to the notion, and I was thinking about changing my name."

"Oh, that was all. Well, now, as regards Mr. Gordon's remarks, you tell him from me that he had better look out."

"But I did say that I was afraid to keep a shop."

"No matter; tell him I say he had better look out. But as to changing your name, I believe I should change mine under like circumstances."

"Oh, thank you, sir, for saying it; now, indeed, I fare to see it cannot be wrong."

"But you must remember, Mrs.—" He paused half an instant, wondering what name she would take.

"Sir, my name is Snaith," she exclaimed. So quick to take the advice she had longed for, so afraid some one should enter and hear her old name.

A clerk at that instant did enter.

"But you must remember, Mrs. Snaith," he repeated, slowly and steadily; then paused to receive and return a message, and when his clerk had shut the door, went on, "You must remember, Mrs. Snaith, that you have many years yet of freedom before your husband can come and take the income."

"But I have to hide all from his children, and I want to begin from the first."

"Then begin by taking leave of me."

"Sir, sir, I mean to do it, though you have been the best and kindest friend I have had for a long time."

He then explained to her how she could receive her income at a distance from the place where she lived.

She went away, and the next afternoon Mr. Gordon desired to speak with him.

("Oh, my prophetic soul!") "Well, show him up," said Mr. Bartlett.

Mr. Gordon explained that he had come about Mrs. Dill's affairs.

"Where is Mrs. Dill?"

"She is gone back to the seaside, sir, with fifty pounds in her pocket as I drew for her."

"You seem to have had some conversation with her, Mr. Gordon."

"Well, I have, sir. But Goodrich's niece is that soft and that straightforward, that she's hardly to be trusted with her own interests."

Mr. Bartlett repeated to the executor that he had better "look out."

The other replied that he had looked out, he had been looking out for some time; and as to the matter of the reinvestment, he had a great wish to spend a portion of the money in buying the goodwill of a business that he had heard of, and in the stock of a man about to retire — "a friend of mine, at Bristol," he began — "a very honest man."

"At Bristol?"

"Ay, sir. A long way off, but a very honest man."

"Hannah Dill has no wish to keep a shop."

"She have altered her mind, sir. She have taken into consideration that I, being an old friend and fellow-townsman of Goodrich's, and, as I have said to her, I know he would wish it — "

"Now, what might you mean in this case by an honest man?"

"Well, I might have said to an old friend, 'Jem Gravison, I am in a fix with poor Goodrich's niece that have married a convict, and have been ill-used by

him in a shameful way. Poor Goodrich,' I might have said, 'have made me his executor, to take care of his money, and he left word that it might be laid out in buying the stock and the goodwill of a business, shoe trade preferred.' I might have said, 'Jem Gravison, have you such to sell?' and being a right-down honest man, he might have made answer, 'Old boy, I have not.'"

At this unexpected conclusion of the sentence, Mr. Bartlett looked up, surprised.

"But yet, you see, it's a fine thing to carry out the blessed laws of the land, and the provisions of poor Goodrich's will; and when me and him had corresponded together, he might have said, 'It's true I did mean to sell, as witness my advertisement in the paper;' and if as well as that he had said — which he may have done — that if he sold to a worse than widow for more than orphans he would take no advantage — me knowing that well enough before — I should call him an honest man."

"And you really mean to tell me," said Mr. Bartlett, with a stolid face, "that you think this man's shop and trade and stock will be a good investment?"

"I do, sir. And I mean to have everything properly gone into — the books, the vally of the goods, bad debts, and what not."

"You had better take a little time to consider this."

"Yes, sir; and I shall want it done in the most legal way. Nothing like fencing yourself round with the law, sir. The will says a part of the property. It never specifies what part."

"No."

"It may be anything short of the whole, then."

Mr. Bartlett, being a little out of temper, answered shortly that it might.

His client took some days to consider, some more to decide how to act, but in the end the stock-in-trade, shop, and goodwill of a certain shoe trade, lately the property of James Gravison, were duly bought and paid for by the executor of the late H. Goodrich, on behalf

of his niece and her husband, the said niece to keep the shop.

Mr. Bartlett did not much like the affair, he therefore took the more care to conduct it with all legal formality; and when all was arranged, it seemed to him to be rather a suspicious circumstance that the executor had left that precise portion of property in his hands which paid what must be called hush-money to the Goodrich family, and which, as Mr. Bartlett remarked, would of course be claimed by the convict husband when he came forth, the wife's resolution not binding him at all to dispose of it thus.

"I have not mentioned that to Goodrich's niece yet, sir," said Mr. Gordon.

Mr. Bartlett said nothing; he had noticed the peculiar emphasis on the word *yet*.

Mr. Gordon informed him, with a certain open cheerfulness of manner, that he had caused Hannah Dill's name to be painted up on the shop; he also pulled out a Bristol paper, wherein Hannah Dill advertised herself as having bought the stock of the late Thomas Gravison, of his brother James Gravison, of the United States of America, and Hannah Dill hoped, by unremitting attention to business, to merit the patronage of the public.

"That advertisement goes into unnecessary details," said Mr. Bartlett. "Did Mrs. Dill indite it?"

"Well, no, sir; she have not that turn for business that I could wish. At present she do not intend to serve in the shop herself, the children being still so sadly." So saying, Mr. Gordon gravely folded up the paper and put it in his pocket.

In the mean time Mrs. Snaith, as she must now be called, quite unaware of the various manœuvres being carried out for her benefit, Mrs. Snaith went back to her children with fifty pounds in her pocket, besides the money she had obtained by the sale of all her best and handsomest clothes. She bought for the two little ones some very handsome frocks, ribbons, and toys, spent two or three days in picking every mark from

their clothes and her own, then packed all up in boxes, with the name of Mrs. Snaith on them, and departed, not leaving even at her lodgings any address, or account of what she might be going to do.

The children were too young to imperil the success of her scheme; neither could talk. They did not know their own names, nor where they had come from.

In a short time the convict husband's day came for writing again. He knew now, through his brother, of his wife's good fortune, therefore, of course, his letter this time was to her.

It had been such an astonishing piece of news that it had wrought in him a certain change. He had a profound contempt for his wife mainly on account of the love which had induced her to throw herself away upon *him*. He believed he had only to flatter her to have back her heart.

He wanted her to believe that he was a reformed character. His letter, therefore, besides being affectionate in language, was full of cant, such cant as is commonly learned in a prison. He meant, when he had a chance, to show what a changed character he was; he even gave her religious and moral advice, as one already in such matters her superior. Then, after lamenting that this money had not come in time to prevent him from throwing himself away, he proceeded to assure his wife that he would make her a happy woman yet, and with unparalleled impudence he continued, that he knew it was hard on her to be away from him so long, but she was not the woman, he knew, to go out of the paths of virtue, and she must take care of the money, and keep herself respectable for his sake.

Uzziah Dill sent this letter through his brother, as he had done the first. He hoped to write to each of the women once a year, and to keep it secret from both that this was the case. So, not knowing his wife's address, he trusted to his brother, directing to him and asking him to read the letter before sending it on, that his dear parents might know how he was.

Jacob Dill saw the game his brother was trying to

play, and felt what a bad fellow he was; but he justified what Hannah Dill had said. He took the man's side, being swayed also by the desire to pacify and conciliate the woman who had brought money into the Dill family.

Jacob Dill sent the letter to Mr. Gordon, asking him to let Hannah have it. Mr. Gordon, who exhibited great fearlessness in acting for others, returned it, informing him that he did not know where Mrs. Dill was, and that they need not trouble themselves to send any more letters to him, as she had means of drawing money without letting him know where she lived.

This was very bad news for the Dills. That Mr. Gordon could not send on the letter was possible, that he would not was evident. In fact, so bad was the news considered, that the drunken old father was sobered by it for the time being, and shaking his head over this "dispensation of Providence," actually went to work at his trade again.

Mr. Gordon did not inform them that he had copied the letter; he did, however, muttering to himself as he folded it and put it in his desk, "For Goodrich's niece is that soft, that she may relent towards the convict after all. This'll help to keep her straight towards doing what's right by her uncle."

CHAPTER V.

IT was now the middle of July; the inhabitants of a beautiful little seaside place in the south-west of England were cleaning their windows, hanging up their fresh white curtains, and putting out placards of the lodgings they had to let.

There was a smell of paint and tar about; the pleasure boats had just been put into first-rate order, and run up on the beach in a tempting phalanx, while the sentimental or patriotic names on their little pennons hung almost unmoved in the sunny air. The landladies grumbled, as they always did every year, said "how short their season was, and that the visitors were long of coming."

The prettiest little terrace boasted as yet of but one lodger, and she, her landlady said, was but a servant — a nurse with some children. "However," continued the good woman, "those that sent her must have sent good money with her, for she pays like her betters, I will say. But she keeps herself mighty close, and has no notion of being asked any questions." This she said to her next-door neighbor, as the two stood to gossip on their respective door-steps. "And so particular about the children's eating! She's almost worse than a lady at that."

In about a week matters mended. The neighbor let her drawing-room floor, several families appeared on the beach, flower-girls began to pervade it, a band played in the evening, and more bathing-machines were pushed down. Soon there were many groups of children dotted about in cheerful proximity to one another, some with nurses, some with mothers, and they all

pleased themselves with the same time-honored toys, buckets, and wooden spades.

A very respectable-looking and plainly dressed nurse was sitting one morning on the beach a little apart from any of these groups. She was at work, just beyond high-water mark, and two lovely little children were playing beside her. One, scarcely a year old, seated on the nurse's gown, was complacently patting the shingle with a wooden spade; the other had a small cart, and had attained to such a degree of intelligence as enabled her to fill it with shells and seaweed, and drag it on a little way, when it generally turned over, and the same operation had to be performed again.

These children were fair, of very refined appearance; rather delicate, with pure complexions, deep-blue eyes, and black lashes.

Some ladies who lodged next door had several times noticed them and their nurse. They evidently had no one else with them. She always kept them delicately clean in their dress. In the morning they wore flapping white sun-bonnets, but in the evening, after their early tea, she used to dress them up in broidered frocks, and take them forth upon the little parade, in all their infantine bravery of pink or blue sashes and ostrich-feathers.

"That woman looks as proud of the children as if they were her own," observed one of the ladies; "their parents may well trust her with them."

"And how very plainly and neatly she dresses," replied the other. "I wish any one of our servants was like her. A clean print gown in the morning, a neat coburg in the evening. The children's dress looks twice as handsome, hers being so unpretending. I wonder whose children they are."

The nurse, Mrs. Snaith, not at all aware of the notice and approval she had attracted, seated herself the following morning nearly in her previous place, while, in a profound calm, the tide was softly coming up.

She looked almost happy, for she was beginning to feel safe, and accustomed to her new name. Her posi-

tion as nurse to the children had been taken for granted the moment she appeared; she had already overheard remarks made on their lovely and refined appearance, and her own evident respectability.

This pleased her. She liked also to observe the beauty of the shore, and went on leisurely working, and watching the water and the two graceful little creatures beside her.

No air stirred but such as was set in motion by the slight action of the oncoming wave; and presently, in the perfect calm of the morning, a sea mist began to rise, and as she looked, the somewhat distant bathing-machines were already in it.

Presently she herself was in it, and all the fishing craft hanging about in the harbor looked as faint as gray ghosts; but each boat, being clearly reflected in the water, seemed to stand up an unnatural height, it was hard to distinguish from its image. The mist did not reach very high; all above was blue and full of light. She put down her work to look, and, half unconsciously, to listen. A crier was pacing up and down the little terrace behind her, with his bell. "Oh yes! oh yes! a bracelet was lost on the beach — a gold bracelet in the form of a snake." The nurse turned, and, as a flat, neutral-tinted outline, could just discern the figure of the crier, as he passed out of hearing. "Oh yes! oh yes!" she heard him begin again, and thén his voice became faint in the distance, and gave way to other sounds. There was a strange kind of creaking and a flapping over the water, but nothing could be seen; the fishing-boats were quite invisible.

It interested her inquiring mind to notice now how all outlines were melting away into the mist. What could that creaking be? There was nothing to make it. Why, yes, there was! An enormous high pole, all aslant, was pushing on right towards her, and two vast sheets hung aloft behind it. Why, this was a ship. She could see the two gaunt masts now, and the ropes, some hanging slack, and the mainsail flapping and coming down. Sailors were swarming about up there,

and now the beachmen came running on to meet the vessel.

The tide was almost at the height, and this must be the coal brig that had been expected, coming up to be beached.

The tall bowsprit appeared to be nearly hanging over her, before the beachmen got up to the brig's bows; and then there was shouting and splashing in the shingle, and she rose and moved backward with the children, for the almost formless wave was washing up close to her feet.

"Oh yes! oh yes!" repeated the crier, now become audible again. "Oh yes! a gold bracelet was lost—a bracelet in the form of a snake, with pearls for eyes. Whoever would bring the same to the hotel on the east cliff, should receive two guineas reward."

She sat down higher up on the shingle, and hearkened as the crier's message waxed loud, and then faint again; and she watched how the heavy rope from the brig was made fast to a clumsy wooden windlass, and how, with stamping and chanting, the beachmen began to turn this round. All was new and fresh to her, and the mist, which generally turns with the tide, had already fallen back a little, dropping behind the nearest fishing-vessels, and giving them and their shadows back to the sunshine before she tired of gazing; and chancing to look round, noticed on her right, and almost close at hand, one of the ladies next door, who, seated also, was smiling on the elder child and trying to attract her.

"She is not shy, ma'am," said Mrs. Snaith; "she will come to you. Shake hands with the lady, missy."

Steps were now heard behind, crashing through the shingle.

"Mrs. Snaith," cried a young girl, "mother says she can get no milk this morning; and what is she to make instead of the pudding for your little ladies?"

"Dear me!" exclaimed the nurse, "no milk? And so fanciful as the dears are! You must tell your mother to boil them each an egg, and to mind they are as fresh as fresh."

"They are delicate?" asked the lady.

"Yes, ma'am, bless them; very delicate."

In the mean time, the elder child had broken loose from the stranger's caresses.

"Pretty dears!" said the lady. "What is their name?"

"That one's name is Amabel."

"Oh, I meant their surname."

A sudden bound at the nurse's heart; for an instant a pause. Then, recovering herself, "Missy, missy!" she cried, starting up, "don't go too near the edge; you'll wet your precious feet.—Now, to think of that question coming so soon, and me not ready for it!" she muttered; and she hastened along the shingle with the younger child in her arms; and, setting her down, took up the elder, who, by various acts of infantile rebellion, did what she could to continue the fascinating play of slopping the water with a long banner of dulse.

In the mean time the little one filled both her hands with what she could find, and the two were shortly carried up by Mrs. Snaith, one under each arm.

"I must take them in at once, ma'am," she remarked, as she hastily passed the lady. "Missy is so wet."

Her face was flushed, and when she got to a safe distance from her questioner, she sat down to take a short rest.

The mist had almost melted away. How grand the brig looked! She thought she had never seen anything more beautiful than the shape of her bows, with reflections of the receding water wavering all over them.

Something nearer than the wave was sparkling. The baby had something fast in her dimpled fist, and was recklessly striking the stones with it, uttering little cries of pleasure when she saw it flash as she knocked it about.

A costly toy! The gold bracelet, the snake with pearls for eyes!

That same evening, when Mrs. Snaith had put her two little nurslings to bed, she left them in charge of her

landlady's daughter, and, dressed in her neatest and plainest habiliments, set forth to find the hotel on the east cliff, and return the bracelet to its owner.

There was never seen a better embodiment of all that a servant ought to be (from the mistress's point of view), than she appeared on that occasion. She was very desirous to have certain things taken for granted, that she might be asked no questions. "Are these your children?" would have been an awkward inquiry. She had made it a very unlikely one. She was so unassuming, so quiet, so respectable in her manner, so unfashionable and economical in her attire, that the position in which she stood toward them had appeared to be evident to every one; but during the whole of this evening walk, even to the moment when she found herself sitting in the hall of the hotel, while a waiter went upstairs to announce her errand, she kept revolving in her mind the question of the morning, and wishing she could decide on a name for the children.

For, as has before been said, this woman in somewhat humble life, and used to common fashions, had thoughts not common, not humble. She had indulged a high ambition. A form of self-sacrifice that most mothers would shrink from as intolerable, had fully shaped itself in her mind, and become a fixed intention. She had deliberately planned to wait on her own children as their nurse, as such to bring them up, and never let them know that they were hers.

For the next eleven years at least she could bring them up in comfort, and educate them well; after that she had every hope that their wretched father would not be able to find her. But, lest such should be the case, she meant to give them a name different from her own, almost at once; to begin to earn money, so that before there was a chance of a ticket of leave for her husband, she could put them to a good school, and having found a guardian for them, leave money enough in his hands to last till they were of an age to go out themselves as governesses. Having made this arrangement, she intended to leave them, deliberately deciding to hear of them and to see them no more.

She would then, indeed, have lost her children. If she were unhappy enough to be found by their wretched father, she would tell him so.

With her mind full of all this, she sat in the hall of the hotel, and her only half-attentive eyes rested on some boxes, with a name painted on them —

"Captain de Berenger, Madras, N.I."

The owner was evidently on his way to the East, and the name of the ship he was to sail in was painted on them also.

Presently a lady and gentleman came down, and began to excuse themselves for having kept her waiting, on the ground that they were in a hurry — just off.

They seemed to be a newly married couple, and while the lady expressed her pleasure at getting the bracelet back, the gentleman was evidently fumbling in his purse for the reward.

"It seemed so hard to lose it," said the lady, clasping the trinket on slowly, as if to give her husband time. "I had quite given it up, for we are off almost directly by the express for Southampton. We cannot wait. — Tom!"

Tom was still not ready. "What did we say?" he whispered. "Two, or three?"

"Sir," cried Mrs. Snaith, now perceiving the state of affairs, "indeed I could not think of such a thing."

"Oh, but we offered a reward!" exclaimed the lady. "Captain de Berenger offered a reward. Pray take it."

"No, ma'am; I don't need it. Indeed, you are kindly welcome."

"Well, at least shake hands, then, and thank you very much indeed;" and all their boxes being already placed on a fly, the lady and gentleman drove off in a hurry, nodding and repeating their thanks till the fly turned a corner.

"De Berenger," thought Mrs. Snaith; "now, that name seems as if it really would do. It has a kind of a foreign sound. It's uncommon. I fare to take to it, and it's not too uncommon, neither. There's De

Berenger, the baker, at Bristol, and there's a shop at Pentonville with that name on the door. These people, too, are off to India; they'll never know I borrowed their name from their boxes. I shall not forget how it was spelt, nor how it goes. And I must be quick, for to-morrow the man will come round again to print the visitors' names in the paper. Mine must not go in again 'Mrs. Snaith and *two children*.'"

So that evening Mrs. Snaith overhauled the children's toys. On one little wooden spade she printed in clear letters, "Amabel de Berenger;" on the other, "Delia de Berenger."

Her eldest child she had named after the young lady whose maid and reader she had been, and had always called her "Missy," as she had called her namesake. Her younger child she had named Delia, partly in remembrance of a tender little song that her husband had sung during the few kind days that had followed their marriage, partly because she had a natural ear for pleasant sounds; and she felt that this now disregarded name was a very beautiful one. Their baptismal names, therefore, the children retained, and received the new surname of De Berenger.

The remainder of the evening she spent in marking some of their pinafores and other clothing; and this done, without any assertion of their name, she let things take their course.

It was only a very few days after this that Mrs. Snaith was startled by an elderly man, who, stopping short in front of her, accosted her with, "Well, and how are you, ma'am? Finely, I hope. You look so."

"Mr. Gordon!"

"Don't be startled," he continued; "there's not a soul within earshot — not even my friend that came with me. I wouldn't go to your lodgings. We have been about on the beach looking for you. Nobody in life" — seeing her look disturbed — "nobody in life know your address but me only. I said in life, for we have no reason to think that H. Goodrich know what I am about to do — I wish he did — and thereby you may be sure it's all right and straight."

Mrs. Snaith said she was sure of that; and he sat down beside her on the shingle, admired the children, one of whom was asleep, and the other eating some luncheon, and then went on —

"Now, look here, H. Goodrich's niece. I told you the will would allow of my buying a stock-in-trade on your behalf, and I sent you the document here to be signed as legal as could be. It cost twenty pound, that transaction did. I bought the stock. 'Twill cost you seven pound ten more, for I had to go to Bristol on your affairs and come here this day, which I cannot afford on my own cost, as H. Goodrich was well aware."

"I'll pay it, sir, and thank you too."

"Well, having bought this stock-in-trade for you, I have nothing more to do with that part of the trust money (as I hope), the part that bring in one hundred and fifty pound a year. But a party that knew your uncle, and have come down here — and let me say would on no hand wrong the widow and the orphan — he have something to say to you. You know what *payable to bearer* means?"

"Yes, I believe I do."

"Such things you know of, as foreign bonds. Say United States bonds. Those are very good securities, and are made payable to bearer. They'll pass from hand to hand like a bank-note; you just show 'em and you take your money. That would be the best thing for you to have."

"Better than the stock-in-trade?"

"Better by half."

"But, bless you, sir, why did you buy the stock-in-trade for me, then; and make out it was such a fine thing to do?"

"Why did I? That's where it is. That's where it is, H. Goodrich's niece. And this I call you, seeing you want to keep your name to yourself. You couldn't get at your money, you perceive, before I did that."

"No. But can I now?"

"I should calculate you bought the stock-in-trade,

meaning, in the way of trade, to sell it again. Retail or wholesale — or wholesale," he repeated presently, when she remained silent.

"Well, sir, I was afraid the person you put in to sell would be a great expense to me. Then you think, if I gain ever so little, I ought to sell wholesale if I get a chance?"

"You won't gain anything at all. A document being wanted, you'll lose several pound. And *I've* no advice to give you, H. Goodrich's niece." The twinkle in his eyes seemed to show joy and triumph. He beckoned to a man near at hand. "There he is. If you want to have what you paid for the stock-in-trade (all but what I specified) in your own hand, payable to bearer, United States bonds, there's the man that will buy your shoes of you, and that have a document in his pocket, and a ink-bottle and pen, that you may sign handy. All I need add is, I wish H. Goodrich was here to see his money rescued from the grasp of a convict."

"Are you sure it's legal, and won't get you into any trouble?" exclaimed H. Goodrich's niece, when the other man had come up, and from a bundle of papers was sorting out one for her to sign.

"Well, so far as we can make out, it is. He" — pointing out his friend — "he have no call to quake, and I expect the thing will hold. All I shall ask is, H. Goodrich's niece, that you keep your distance, and never let me know anything about you. I can get into no trouble for eleven year at the least. If I should then (and not likely), you'll promise me you'll always, wherever you be, take the *Suffolk Chronicle;* and if I'm in life then, and you see an advertisement in it letting you know I've got into trouble, then you'll have to write to me. But I'm not afraid. There's a pretty little income — over thirty pounds a year — left in my hands, and if a certain party made himself unpleasant and wanted the rest of it, he could be threatened with a suit in the Divorce Court, and I think he'll be glad enough to let things be."

"The purchase was legal, ma'am," observed the stranger; "your executor has the papers to prove it."

"And when our friend is going to take the boots and shoes is neither here nor there," proceeded Mr. Gordon.

"You'll take notice, though," continued the stranger, "that bonds and what not, made payable to bearer, are in one sense very ticklish property to keep. If they get burnt you've no remedy, if you lose them you've no remedy, or lose one, and whoever finds it holds it and gets the money. And I don't mean to say as you can always reckon on the same sum for them, not to a shilling or even a pound, because the dollar varies slightly in value, you know."

"I'll sign the paper," said Hannah Dill at last. "I fare to understand that I'm a free woman for good and all, and I'm deeply obliged to you both."

CHAPTER VI.

AND now the document which sold her stock-in-trade to J. Gravison having been duly signed by Hannah Dill (who for many a long day never used that name again), a large, awkward-shaped bundle of papers having been consigned to her, and Mr. Gordon having again remarked "that where those boots and shoes were going, and where the purchaser might be going, was neither here nor there," the two friends made as if they would withdraw, but this did not at all suit the notions of the convict's wife.

She longed to give them at least a dinner, and after a little pressing they agreed that she should; and she left them on the beach, while she hastened to her lodgings with her children and the papers, where, having secured the latter, and taken out money for her executor's expenses, she got her landlady to take charge for a few hours of the former.

"Certain," quoth the landlady, "I'll see to your little ladies, ma'am, with the greatest pleasure; don't you worrit about them."

So Mrs. Dill came forth again, and conducted the two friends to a respectable public-house, much frequented by sea captains and farming people.

Here, while they sat in a green bower out-of-doors and smoked, she ordered and assisted to produce such a dinner as might be a credit to her taste and her generosity, and a thing to be remembered ever after.

It was not ready till half-past three, the two guests having been more than ready for some time.

First appeared dishes for which the place was famous

— soused mackerel at one end, and at the other hot lobsters, served whole, with brown bread and butter and bottled porter.

After this came a rumpsteak pie with fresh young onions, also a green goose, and abundance of peas and kidney potatoes. With this course the company drank beer. One of the guests observed with conviction that even a Guildhall dinner could not beat this, and the other remarked that it was what he called "a square meal."

Next came an apricot pudding with a jug of cream, and a dish of mince pies, blue with the spiral flame of the lighted rum they were served in.

All this took time, but at every fresh call on their efforts the guests fell to again, nothing daunted; there was no flagging but in the conversation.

With the cheese and dessert appeared port, and the affair concluded with more pipes in the arbor, and some gin and water.

It was a great success.

In the cool of the evening they said they must depart, and each giving an arm to H. Goodrich's niece, they walked in high good humor, and very steadily on the whole, to the railway station, she seeing them off, with many thanks on her part for their kindness, and on theirs for her hospitality.

Mrs. Snaith then hastened to her lodgings. Already her peculiar position had made her cautious and reserved. She seldom began a conversation, or volunteered any information, however trifling, which gave others an opening for asking questions.

She found the children asleep and well, thanked her landlady, and, seeing her weekly bill on the table, paid it, and said she should stay on.

The landlady retired. She began to understand her lodger; she found her a just woman to reckon with, though not one to waste words.

"Why, if she bought her words by the dozen," thought the good woman, "and was always considering how to use them to the best advantage, and make them

go as far as they would, she could not any way be more mean with them."

Mrs. Snaith, asking no questions, did not hear how much "the little ladies" had been admired that day, nor how much curiosity they had excited.

For the small place being very full of visitors, the landlady and her young daughter had amused themselves during their lodger's absence by sitting in the open window of her pleasant parlor, which was downstairs, and watching "the company," while little Miss Amabel and Miss Delia played about the room with their toys.

It was a pride and joy to them to see the place so crowded, and to observe the new-comers looking about for lodgings.

Little Amabel in the mean time was setting out a row of wooden tea things on the sill of the window, and the baby Delia, who could but just walk alone, trotted up to her to admire, and presently began to toss some of them out on to the pavement below.

This was a fine thing to have done, and the little creatures looked on with deep interest, while the landlady's daughter, called 'Ria, went down the steps of the street door, and fetched them in again.

Little Delia, having tasted the joy of this small piece of mischief, now threw out her shore-spade, while Amabel, not to be outdone, filled a toy wooden bucket with the animals from a Noah's ark, and one by one sent them after it, the long-suffering 'Ria going out, with unwise patience, to collect and bring them back, as if the vagaries of children were no more under human control than are the rising of the wind or the changes of the moon.

"How tiresome gentlefolk's children are, mother!" she said at last, when, to the amusement of the ladies next door, who were reading novels on a bench, she came forth for the eleventh time and picked up two elephants and a canary; "why, they give ten times the trouble that we do when we're little."

"Ay," answered the mother, with a sage air of con-

viction, "it's all very well to say they're the same flesh and blood as we are; there's that difference, anyhow. You won't easy deceive me; I'd undertake to tell a gentleman's child by it anywhere. They've no responsibility in 'em either. Why, a big child five year old will run away from her nurse, and her nurse just has to run after her, while at that age you took the baby as then was on the beach, and had Tom to take care of with you."

"But they're minded," said the girl; "that's why they can't *seem to grow any responsibility* of their own."

"There!" said one of the ladies to the other, "that girl is putting away the Noah's ark and giving the child a doll to play with. I wonder she did not think of doing so before. Look! there comes the spade again."

Two lovely little faces looked out as before, and some infantile babble was heard, but no landlady's daughter came forth to bring it in; so, lest it should be lost to its small possessor, one of the ladies, before she went indoors, picked it up, intending to bring it to the window.

"Amabel de Berenger!" she exclaimed, reading the name. "Why, Mary, these children are De Berengers! I wonder which branch of the family they belong to?"

"Not to the old baronet's," observed the other. "His sons are unmarried; at least, Tom de Berenger was only married a few weeks ago, and was here till lately on his wedding tour."

"They may be strangers from another neighborhood," observed the first. "The name is not so very uncommon;" and she came to the outside of the window, giving the spade to its dimpled owner, remarking to the landlady that she was intimate with one family of De Berengers, and asking where these children came from.

The landlady did not know, and little miss was backward with her tongue, as delicate children often were. They only had a nurse with them, she said, and she looked at the spade with just a little touch of curiosity.

"Dear me!" said the lady. "I should like to see

that nurse again; but, unfortunately, we go away this evening. Perhaps these are Mr. Richard de Berenger's children, and their parents may be coming."

"I think not, ma'am," replied the landlady. "I have not heard of it."

Thereupon, having kissed the children, this lady departed, and the landlady said to her daughter, "Well, 'Ria, my girl, only think how I have wished to ask Mrs. Snaith who the children were, and didn't seem to think she would like it, she being so close, and yet all the time here was their name as plain as print for anybody that liked to look at it!"

"You didn't know their name, mother?" cried the girl.

"No; I say I didn't. Did you?"

"Well, I don't know as I gave it a thought that she hadn't mentioned it, till one night (last week I think it was) I noticed it on some pinafores that she sent to the wash."

"It just shows what fancies folks take in their heads," observed the landlady. "I felt as sure as could be she didn't want to tell who they were, and so I never asked her; and now look!" She held up the spade and laughed.

They might be that parson's children," said the girl; "him that was here three summers ago, mother, in our house, with his boy brother and his aunt."

"Hardly," answered the mother; "he was not a married man then, I know."

"My!" cried the girl, "how those two used to tease that aunt, the lady that would always be talking of her will. I was so little then, they used to go on while I was waiting, and not mind me. Well, to be sure, what a silly old thing she was!"

"And you were always as handy as could be. To see you wait, so little as you were, has made many a lodger laugh," observed the mother, with pleasant pride in her offspring.

Here the conversation ended, Mrs. Snaith never hearing of the questions that had been asked concern-

ing the children, nor of the reminiscences of 'Ria and her mother. The half of either, if duly reported, would have changed her plans entirely, and changed her children's destiny and her own.

Mrs. Snaith quickly found that she was living very much beyond her income, so she very soon went away from that little seaside place; but her delicate children had improved during their stay so much, that she proposed to come back again when the season was quite over, and rooms might be had for an almost nominal rent, to give them again the benefit of the fine air.

She thus betrayed to the landlady her expectation that these children would be some time under her sole charge and control. The good woman was all the more deferential to her in consequence, and finding her more reticent day by day, took care to let her depart without asking her a single question.

Mrs. Snaith thought what a nice hard-working woman she was — one who minded her own business, and had no idle curiosity in her — and she was perhaps beguiled by this opinion into the only piece of confidence she offered, namely, that she had brought these children from London.

She established herself about twelve miles inland, in a small village, where she found a decent little cottage to let. She wanted to save money, that she might send her darlings, when they were old enough, to a good school; but, meanwhile, she dressed them well and waited on them with the devoted love of a mother, combined with her assumed position of nurse.

It was enough to satisfy and make happy and cheerful a mind constituted as hers. She grew stout, looked well and serene, and month by month her darlings became fresher and fatter; only little Delia, as she fancied, sometimes limped a little on her right foot, and this made her anxious, considering the child's parentage.

There were no mothers in the village whom she could consult excepting the wives of two small farmers, and they both recommended that little miss should be taken to the shore to paddle in the salt water. They were sure that was what the father would approve.

It had come to be thought there — a thought which had grown out of the remarks of the villagers one to another — that the children's father was abroad: that they had lost their mother seemed to be evident.

Mrs. Snaith — her security in that obscure place having been so complete — did not think of stepping forth again into the inquisitive world without a pang. She had taken up her new name and position in a far more confident spirit than she now felt in carrying them on. Month by month she became more afraid of ultimate detection, not so much by the wretched father, as by the children themselves.

She had lived in her tiny cottage two years, and their infantile intelligence was equal already to the perception (a false one, but not the less tenaciously held) that there was a difference of rank between them and their dear nurse. They could by no means have expressed this, but every one about them helped it to unconscious growth.

Amabel was six years old. In her sweet humility the mother considered herself not equal to teaching even so much as the alphabet to a child destined to be herself a teacher.

She had tried hard to divest herself of her provincial expressions, some of which her dear lady had pointed out to her. In many cases she had succeeded, but her grammar was faulty, and certain peculiarities of language clung yet to her daily English. She wanted little Amabel to speak well from the first, and she went to a poor, but well-educated old lady — the late clergyman's sister, who boarded in a farm-house near her cottage — and proposed to her to teach the child for two or three hours a day. Miss Price said she should be delighted to teach little Miss de Berenger, and she instilled into her mind, while so doing, various notions not out of place considering the position she supposed her to hold. She must remember that she was a young lady. She must never talk in a sing-song tone, as her good nurse did; that was provincial. Her dear papa would be much vexed if she used such and such ex-

pressions. No doubt she often thought about her dear papa, and wished that he should be pleased with her on his return.

Little Amabel was a docile child: she did begin to wish to please this dear papa. In her infantile fashion she felt a strange attraction toward him, and set him in her mind far above the tender woman whose care and pride she was, while, like most other children who have a governess and a nurse, she gave her kisses to the nurse, and talked like the governess.

But little Delia, in case her ankle was really weak, must have every advantage, whatever happened. So Mrs. Snaith wrote to her former landlady, asking the price of rooms, and was told that if she could come at a particular time mentioned, between two other "Lets," she should have some cheap. She felt, when she appeared at the door with the children, that she had not gained courage, though she had been on the whole very happy; she knew the day must come when she would be confronted by awkward questions. She had often rehearsed in her mind the words she would use in reply. They were to be very few and simple, and long reflection had made her aware that her danger of self-betrayal would lie most in the way she met matters that were taken for granted.

The landlady thought her more "close" than ever. "I did not expect to see your little ladies so much grown and so rosy," she remarked. "I thought, ma'am, you said Miss Delia was not well."

"It was only that I thought her ankle was weak," said Mrs. Snaith, anxiously. "I fared to think she turned one of her feet in more than the other when she walked."

This conversation took place while the landlady cleared away breakfast the day after Mrs. Snaith's arrival. "Many children do that," quoth the good woman, impelled, spite of her own interest, to make a suggestive observation. "Why, dear me, ma'am, their father will be a strange gentleman if he is not satisfied, when he returns, that you have done the best anybody could for them."

She was rewarded for once. Mrs. Snaith colored all over her honest, homely face; concealment did not come easily to her. She answered that she had no reason at all to think he would not be satisfied, and her reply, considering the character of this said father, seemed to herself almost ridiculous; she knew well that he cared for their welfare not a straw. And the landlady, not having been contradicted, supposed herself to know that the children's father was abroad.

Mrs. Snaith fell easily into her old habit of sitting at work on the beach while she watched the children playing at the edge of the wave. They were very much grown. Both were lovely, and in all respects unlike herself. She instinctively kept apart from the other nurses and children. Her quiet life went on in a great silence, yet she was happy; love and service contented her. She was safe for a long while to come from the husband whose drunken brawls had made life a misery, and whose crimes had kept her in constant fear. She was freed from want, and that alone was enough to make her wake every morning in a conscious state of thankfulness.

The fortnight she had meant to stay at the seaside had almost come to an end, and she was watching Delia one afternoon, and feeling almost contented with her pretty little white ankles. That slight something, whatever it had been, habit or weakness, had almost disappeared, and, lovely and rosy, the little creature was paddling in the water with her sister, when clear through the still air rang a voice that she recognized, as its owner came up briskly to her side.

"Why, there's that nurse again, the person that I told you of! And the children with her. There they all are, I declare!"

Mrs. Snaith turned slowly and saw the lady who had asked the children's name two years ago. She had never forgotten her, nor that her landlady had called her Miss Thimbleby. They hurried up.

"You have forgotten me, perhaps?"

"No, ma'am."

They sat down near her. "I saw the children's name on their spades," said Miss Thimbleby. "This" — pointing out the other lady with an air, as if she was giving some intelligence that must be most welcome — "This is Miss de Berenger."

"Indeed, ma'am," said Mrs. Snaith, with slow and quiet caution; and she lifted attentive eyes to the stranger, who nodded and smiled.

"Yes, I am Miss de Berenger. You have heard him speak of me, no doubt?"

"Him?"

"He was always my favorite," continued the lady, who seemed both glad and excited, "and of course he must have mentioned me. Indeed, I am sure of it."

This was rather a startling speech.

"I don't understand you, ma'am," said Mrs. Snaith, slowly. She looked again at Miss de Berenger. It did not require much penetration to see that she was not a wise woman; her style of dress alone might have suggested this thought, if there had been nothing else about her to do it.

"And I have looked for you repeatedly, and told my nephew Felix all about you; but we never could find you, either of us."

"Looked for us! Indeed, ma'am, may I ask why?"

"Why? why?" exclaimed Miss Thimbleby, with reproachful astonishment. "Do I really hear you asking why?"

A little useful resentment here rising in Mrs. Snaith's breast enabled her to answer rather sharply, "Yes, you do." And she looked again at the lady who had been mentioned as Miss de Berenger.

She was a slender, upright little woman of between fifty and sixty, nearer to the latter age. Her hair, not precisely red, was yet too near that color to pass for golden. It was abundant for her time of life, free from gray, and dressed in long loose curls, so light and "fluffy," that they blew about with the slightest movement in the air. Her dress was of that reddish purple which makes orange look more conspicuous. She had

a green parasol, wore a good deal of jewelry, had a jaunty air, and might have passed for little more than forty — so brisk and youthful was she — but that her cheeks were streaked with the peculiar red of an apple that has been kept into the winter — a bright, fixed hue, which early in life is scarcely even seen.

The other lady was very plainly dressed, and seemed to be under thirty. She started up on hearing Mrs. Snaith's last word, and going to the edge of the wave, brought back with her the two children, who, a little surprised by Miss de Berenger's gay appearance, stood gazing at her for a moment, their shining bare feet gleaming white on the sand, and their rosy mouths pouting with just the least little impatience at being taken away from the water.

"The very image of him!" exclaimed Miss de Berenger, shaking back her curls and clasping her hands. "Come and kiss me, my pretty ones."

The children, with infantile indifference, gave the required kisses, looked at the lady, looked at Mrs. Snaith; but the one was drying her eyes, the other watchful, to discover what this might mean. She turned cold, but did not look at her darlings, so they took the opportunity to slip away and run back to the water.

"Where is their father now?" asked Miss de Berenger. "Ah, I was very fond of him. If he had only stopped at home, I should have left him everything." A twinkling in her eyes seemed to promise tears. She wiped them again, though these proofs of feeling had not come. "Where is he?"

"I don't know, ma'am," said Mrs. Snaith, who now laid down her work, to hide the trembling of her hands.

"He is abroad, of course?"

"Ma'am, I am not sure."

Both answers perfectly true.

The reluctance to speak was evident; it seemed to astonish Miss de Berenger, even to the point of making her silent.

"Why, surely," exclaimed the other lady, with a certain air of severity, as if by the weight of her disappro-

val she hoped to oppress Mrs. Snaith into giving her testimony — "surely you can have no objection to answer a few questions — such natural questions as these, nurse!"

"Perhaps she has had her orders," murmured Miss de Berenger.

Mrs. Snaith for the moment was much surprised at this question. Under whose orders could they think she was?

"Unless that is the case," said Miss Thimbleby, with uncivil directness, "I cannot understand what reason you can have for concealing anything from Miss de Berenger — what *good* reason."

Again indignation came to the aid of Mrs. Snaith. She rose on hearing this, took up the children's shoes and socks, and turning her back on the two ladies, went down to the water's edge, and called her little barefooted treasures to come to her.

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. SNAITH had no sooner got away from the two ladies, than she began to wonder why she had been so much alarmed. She had hardly understood at first that Miss de Berenger claimed the children as relations. "And why," she thought, "should this have frightened me? I have no presence of mind at all. I should have told her she was mistaken, and there would have been an end. Folks cannot take them from me; and if I make it seem to everybody that I am their nurse, and allow that their father is living, it's natural — I fare to see now — that people should think I must be under his orders."

She turned while seated on the sand, fitting on little boots. Miss de Berenger was behind her.

"We did not mean to offend you," she exclaimed, shaking back her curls. "I am sure, nurse, you are doing your duty by the darlings, but —"

"I am not offended with *you*, ma'am," answered Mrs. Snaith, when she stopped short. "Anybody can see that you are quite the lady, and had no thought of being rude."

"Then I wish you would be a little more open, nurse. You say you do not know where their father is, but you might at least tell me how long it is since you heard from him."

Mrs. Snaith pondered, then gave the truth. "Two years and three months, ma'am. But will you sit down a minute? Run on, my pretty ones."

The children, nothing loath, obeyed. Miss de Berenger sat down.

"Ma'am, you make it plain that you think these children must be related to you."

"Of course; I am sure of it."

"Well, ma'am, then it is my duty to tell you that they are not. You don't owe them any kindness, I do assure you. They are not related to you at all."

"Not that you know of," said Miss de Berenger, in correction. "But," she continued, "there might be family reasons, you must allow — very important family reasons — for not telling you everything about them."

She was perfectly polite in her manner, but this pertinacity alarmed Mrs. Snaith again. What should she say next? She had not decided, when Miss de Berenger went on —

"Did he tell you to bring them here? Because, if he did, it must have been on purpose that I or some of us might find them out, and acknowledge them."

Here was at least a suggestion which could be met and denied.

"Nobody told me to bring them here, ma'am. I do assure you I did it wholly to please myself, and out of my own head."

"Well, well, Felix must be told of this," said Miss de Berenger, not at all convinced. She twisted one of her curls over rather a bony finger. "I shall consult Felix, and he will soon get to the root of the matter."

"I don't think Felix will," thought Mrs. Snaith, and a furtive smile, in spite of herself, gleamed in her eyes.

"But, surely," continued the good lady, "you can have no motive for being more reticent with me than with the person in whose lodgings you are. She knows that you brought the children first from London, that their father is away, and that they have lost their mother, for she told us so."

"Did she, ma'am?" said Mrs. Snaith; and pondering the matter in her mind, she felt sure she had never said they had lost their mother.

"You are entrusted with the entire charge of them," was the next question; "is it not so?"

"Yes; they have no one to look after them but me."

"They are very like the family, and so my friend remarked, when she saw them here some time ago."

"Do you mean that person who was with you just now?" quoth Mrs. Snaith. She was still offended with her.

"She is quite a lady," exclaimed Miss de Berenger instantly, losing sight of the matter in hand to defend this person. "It is true that she has married Mr. de Berenger's fellow-curate, which was a most imprudent thing to do (and everybody said so), particularly as he had been plucked at college till he had hardly a feather left on him; but she would have him, and they were married, and had twin children with lightning rapidity. She is come here with me to get cured, if possible, of a bad cough that she has had ever since some months before their birth. But, indeed, what could she expect, going out as she did when the roads were blocked up with snow, and the thermometer yards below zero?"

The lady in question now made herself audible, as she came pounding down through the shingle to join them. It was evident to her keen observation that no fresh information had been obtained.

Mrs. Snaith rose, and, preparing to follow the children, made a bow to Miss de Berenger, whereupon the mother of twins said coldly—

"Miss de Berenger is very much hurt, and very much surprised too—that I can plainly see—by the way in which you have repelled her kind advances. The children's true interests are evidently very far from your thoughts. You can only think of your own."

"Good afternoon, ladies," said the nurse, tossing her head rather haughtily; and she passed on, half frightened again. There was a self-satisfied air of authority in the speaker, and something threatening in her tone, which, under the circumstances, was very ridiculous, and yet a certain effect was produced on her who knew those circumstances best.

Not even a mother could seriously believe that any one wanted to steal her children. Mrs. Snaith did not reach that point of folly; but she felt uneasy and in-

secure, as if, having ceased to admit her maternity, she had lost power over them.

Her boxes were already packed, she having always intended to go away by that evening's train; and she was truly glad that the little chaise was at the door and the two children in it, when Miss de Berenger coming up with her friend, she noticed the puzzled look of the one and the displeasure of the other.

She had bid her landlady good-bye, and had directed her driver to the station, when the voice of the late Miss Thimbleby struck on her ear. "Why, the woman's actually running away!"

"Drive on," said Mrs. Snaith.

"Running away, ma'am!" cried the landlady, looking after the chaise as it bore off her late lodgers. "Quite the contrary, I do assure you. Mrs. Snaith would have been very thankful to stay, if I could have kept her. As it is, I've let her stop on till I'm very hard drove to clean up for my next 'let.' Nobody ever 'runs away' from this place; and goodness knows there's little need, so healthy and bracing as it is."

Miss de Berenger hastened to say something complimentary concerning the place, and, in return, the landlady obliged her with the address of her late lodger.

About ten days after this, while Mrs. Snaith, already calmed by a sense of remoteness from observation, was pleasing herself with the certainty that her little Delia walked now as well as other children, Miss de Berenger took an opportunity to open her mind to her nephew, and fill him with a vague sense of responsibility towards these children.

Felix de Berenger was seven and twenty, a bachelor. He had lately been presented to a living, a very small one in point of income, but having a good-sized and comfortable house attached to it; a most excellent garden, two fields, an orchard, and a poultry yard.

To this place he had thankfully removed what little furniture he possessed, together with his books and his two brothers; also the nurse who had brought up the younger of these, and now, with a village girl to help

her, did all the work of the parsonage, including the care of a cow and a pig.

His circumstances were peculiar. While he was yet almost in infancy, his father's regiment had been ordered to India, and he had been left behind. Several children, born to his parents during the next few years, had died in early childhood, and they had returned to England for the year's leave with one only, a boy just eight years younger than Felix.

The mother made great lamentation over the loss of her children, from the hot climate not suiting them. She left the second son behind also, and returning to India with her husband, the same misfortune overtook her again — her infants died; and it was not till after her final return to her native country that the youngest of her surviving children was born. He was now between seven and eight years old — a delicate little fellow, childlike in appearance, fully nineteen years younger than his eldest brother, and, being already orphaned, wholly dependent on the said brother both for maintenance and affection.

Miss de Berenger, a woman of good fortune, had come to stay with her dear nephew Felix, and, in her own opinion, to help him. She loved to scheme for other people, but out of her ample means she afforded them nothing but schemes.

Yet she was not accounted mean, for she was perfectly consistent. If people render help to those near to them at intervals, which are felt to be remote, or if their frequent presents are considered to be inadequate, they are thought ungenerous; but if they never give anything at all, they often escape from such an imputation. The minds of others are at rest concerning them, the looking out for needed assistance not being connected with them.

The late Mrs. de Berenger had considered her husband's only brother to be extremely mean; and this was mainly because once, when her little Dick was a baby, he had caused his wife, with profuse expressions of good will from him, to bring the child a handsome little merino coat.

Miss de Berenger, having come to stay with her dear nephew Felix, was waiting in his pleasant dining-room till he should appear to breakfast.

He had been away from home when she arrived; sitting up with a sick parishioner, whose bedside he had not left till late in the night. She had not, therefore, seen him, and was now occupied in looking about her.

There were only six chairs in the room; these were of a very light description. "Four-and-sixpence each, I should think," she reflected; "certainly, not more." Then there were two large, solid book-cases, which were so disposed as to make the most of themselves. A square of carpet was spread in the middle of the room, and on this stood the table; all uncovered parts of the floor being stained brown. This scanty furnishing made the large room look larger. It looked, also, rather empty — for it was rather empty.

She walked to one of the windows, and, gazing out, saw what pleased her better. On the right, but a good way off, was a very high and thick yew-tree hedge, with a square place in front of it paved with small coggle-stones. In this grew two fine walnut trees. Nearer to her, and only divided from the paved yard by a line of artificial rock-work scarcely a foot high, was a large, beautiful garden, which, close to the house, was planted with rose-bushes, lilies, tree-peonies, and many lovely old-fashioned plants, called by modern gardeners "herbaceous rubbish." Those pernicious weeds, the scarlet geranium and the yellow calceolaria, had not found their way into it. As this garden sloped away from the house, large fruit trees of fine growth appeared among the flower borders; climbing clematis, white or purple, was folded round the trunks of some. Further off still, but not divided by any hedge from the flowers, excellent crops of various vegetables might be seen.

A second window in the dining-room showed her a mossy old lawn, in which grew two immense fir trees, and between them was visible the broad, low tower of a village church.

Felix came down, his young brother Amias followed; a few words of welcome were said, then the bell was rung for prayers, and in came the two servants, the little brother Dick, and Miss de Berenger's maid.

If Felix had not been thinking of his sick parishioner, he must have noticed the restlessness of his aunt. As it was, he proceeded, after prayers, to help her to her breakfast, with nothing to break the force of his surprise, when, after little Dick had shut the door behind him, she flung back her curls and exclaimed, with an air of triumph —

"Yes! Well, now, Felix, well, now, Amias, what do you think? I've discovered the most astonishing family mystery that you ever heard of. It's enough to make your hair stand on end."

They were both well used to their aunt's sensational speeches: to do her justice, it was their habit of insisting on not being astonished at what she had to say, which mainly led to her constantly making her statements more and more startling.

Amias continued to cut the bread quite calmly, but Felix paused with his fork in the bacon. His aunt's bright red cheeks had taken a clearer dye than usual; she was evidently excited herself, not merely trying to excite them.

"I told you," she exclaimed, tossing back her curls to cool her face — "I told you I believed I was on the track of John's children. Poor John! Yes, I've found them, Felix. And their nurse, being alarmed at something (what, I don't know), positively stood me out, and declared that they were no relations of ours. Poor little waifs, they are the very image of him; and unless we show a parent's heart towards them, Felix, I really do not know what is to become of them."

Felix, unequal to the task of cutting the bacon, left the fork sticking upright in it.

"John's children!" he exclaimed. "Why, John's not married; at least, I never had a hint that he was, much less that he had a family."

"Nor had I, Felix; but I always suspected that,

when he quarrelled with his father and went away, he *did* marry that young person. And I have no doubt, whatever the nurse may say, that he sent her to D—— on purpose that I might fall in with the children. Her conduct was most peculiar; she no sooner found out that they were relations of mine, than she rushed off with them. But she had better mind what she is about. I am going to write to her, for I have her address, and I shall tell her that if I go to law with her, it will certainly be brought in 'abduction of an heiress.'"

"An heiress!" exclaimed Felix, "She cannot be John's child, then."

"She is a very lovely little girl; and if I make a will in her favor, she will turn out to be an heiress. And then, as I said, that nurse had better look out, or she will get herself transported for carrying her off as she has done."

At this point the two brothers seemed to lose their interest in the matter, and to find their wonder subside, so that they could begin to eat their breakfast.

She then gave an account of what had passed, but at the same time taking so much for granted, and so piecing together what she had been told, what she thought, and what the landlady had thought, that Felix, in spite of himself, could not help believing that these children must be John de Berenger's daughters.

John de Berenger was the third son of old Sir Samuel de Berenger, who, having married late in life. was the father of a family very little older than Felix de Berenger, the son of his nephew.

The baronet's eldest son, for whom he had never cared much, was a confirmed invalid, spending most of his time at Algiers or in Italy. He was a married man, but childless. The second son, Tom, had just married, and gone to join his regiment in India. The third, John, who was not without certain endearing qualities, was no credit to any one belonging to him. He was reckless of opinion, extravagant, and so hopelessly in debt, that he would certainly have been outlawed, but that there was only one healthy life between him and

the baronetcy; and his father, moreover, was both rich and old. So that it seemed to his creditors wise to wait on the chance of his inheriting, at least, enough to pay his debts, provided they did not make his father aware how great these were.

"I cannot bear to hear poor John called the reprobate of the family," exclaimed Miss de Berenger, "and threatened with outlawry, dear fellow!"

It was partly on account of the word "outlaw" that Miss de Berenger took a romantic interest in John. No halo hangs about vulgar debt, but outlawry brings to mind the Lincoln green, bows and arrows, and a silver horn to blow upon under the greenwood tree.

"I wish you would not tease the *old man* about these children," said Amias. "Hasn't he enough to think of just now? I'm the reprobate of the family. I repudiate John; he's an impostor."

"Yes, indeed, Amias," cried Miss de Berenger instantly, remembering that she ought to bear her testimony against the youth's behavior. "Yes, very sad. I've heard of your conduct. Sir Sam wrote to me in a rage. I hear you've turned teetotaler as well, on purpose to insult him; and I'm informed that you said brewing was not a proper trade for a gentleman."

"I said drunkenness was the cause of almost all the misery in the country. I said there was hardly a judge on the bench who had not declared that it had to do with nine-tenths of the crime that came before him. I said—"

"Now, look here," exclaimed Felix, suddenly rousing up, "I can stand a good deal, but I can't and won't stand a temperance lecture on the top of John's children!" Then thinking, perhaps, that he had been a little too vehement, he added and half laughed, "It's all right, my boy."

"The *old man* has a great deal to worry him just now," said Amias, excusing his brother's sudden heat to his aunt.

"And after he had been so kind—I mean, Sir Sam had been so kind—and proposed to take you into the

concern, and in time give you an interest in it! Yes, it is very sad."

"Well, you would not have had me be such a sneak, I suppose, as not to tell Uncle Sam what I'd done. Everybody else knew. I'd been bursting with rage some time to think how we were actually the ruin of people. But that was not why I did it, I can tell you; I did it for fun. When that temperance fellow came into the village, and stood on a kitchen chair ranting, a lot of people soon got round him, and some of them cheered and some jeered me as I came calmly by and stopped to listen."

"Ah! stopped to listen, Amias. That shows what comes of tampering with evil. Well?"

"Well, presently two drunken men came reeling up, and insisted on shaking hands with me. And the people hauled out another chair from a cottage, and declared that I must mount it and answer him. I had not known at first what it was that he was ranting about, with 'dear brethren,' and 'dear sisters,' and 'dear fellow-sinners.' By the time I did know they would not let me off; they stamped and cheered, and said it was election time, and I must and should speak up for the old concern."

"Well, Amias, well."

"Why, the tide turned against the temperance man; they hooted him down. And (I was excited at first, you know, it seemed such fun) so I got on the chair and imitated the man, his cockney talk and cant. I did him capitally; I ranted till they all shrieked with laughter. And then I stopped, for I knew I was doing the devil's work. I stopped, I tell you, and I told them the temperance man was quite right, and asked them if they didn't know it, and all that; and then Felix coming up, I felt that I was stumped, and I jumped down and ran off. I could hear every step I took on the grass, the people were so still; I suppose it was with astonishment."

"Very sad," said Miss de Berenger again. Felix smiled.

"So," continued the boy, "I thought the next day I had better go and tell it all to Uncle Sam. The *old man* thought so too: so I went and did for myself, for, of course, he sent me packing. And here I am."

"Well," said Miss de Berenger, with some bitterness, and what was meant for irony, "then, I hope the *old man* made you welcome."

"Yes," said Felix, calmly, "I did."

"You needn't shake your head, aunt," proceeded the boy. "I'm glad I did it."

Miss de Berenger had sense enough to see that what she might say on this subject could have no effect. She returned to her former theme; she did not see how poor John's children were to be educated.

"The proper person to tell this to is old Sam himself," observed Felix.

"Oh, I have written to him, my dear Felix. I have laid the whole matter before him, and —"

"And what?"

"And he repudiates them utterly! But if he could see them, beautiful little creatures, and such a respectable nurse, I'm sure it would soften his heart."

"How can John afford a nurse? His father allows him very little to live on."

"Very little. I thought it so touching to see them handsomely dressed when John must be almost in want. It shows his heart is in the right place. And then, no doubt, he had them thrown in our way, hoping we should take them up."

"If that is the case, why, in the name of common sense, did their nurse carry them off?"

"Why, my dear, she might not know his motive, or she was afraid, perhaps, that my penetration, or some unexpected question of mine, might lead her to betray what she is probably aware must not be told — that is, where John's abode is."

"It sounds queer," said Felix.

Miss de Berenger took no notice of this remark, but dashed into what seemed a perfectly different subject.

"And what about poor little Dick? He has had no

lessons at all since you came here. Yes, he ought to have a governess, for he is far too delicate to go to school."

"Aunt, you know very well that I cannot afford a governess just yet."

"But, Felix, I have matured a scheme. Yes. I have thought it out. I wish I was more thankful for this talent committed to me of planning for others. You know dear Cecilia's sister, Ann Thimbleby, of course?"

"Of course," said Felix, without any enthusiasm.

"Dear Cecilia would like so much to have her near at hand. But then, you know, Ann has to educate her little sister, and she finds it extremely difficult to meet with any one who will take a governess and a ten-years'-old sister with her."

"I should think so!"

"Ann Thimbleby asks forty pounds a year salary.'

"Oh."

"Felix, do listen."

"Ann Thimbleby asks forty pounds a year salary, you said."

"Yes, Felix; but she and the child are vegetarians. Just think of your garden. It would cost you a mere nothing to feed them, with the eggs, too, that you have from the poultry yard, and the milk from your cow. You would still (when your family was supplied) have fruit and vegetables to exchange for groceries, as I explained to you was commonly done. If you would give her little sister board and lodging, and let Ann teach her with Dick, Ann would take ten pounds a year and be thankful. I know she would, for she has twenty pounds a year of her own."

"I could not afford even that. I should still be out of pocket."

"Yes, you would — perhaps almost as much as twenty pounds a year. Yes. But, then, there are these little De Berengers. I have ascertained that their nurse pays a certain Miss Price twenty pounds for teaching them. Now, Felix, if that woman would come and

live in the village, you could agree with Ann to teach the four children together, and you, receiving the twenty pounds, would get Dick educated for nothing. You would keep a kind of co-operative store for the benefit of all parties, the goods being children."

Felix was struck with surprise.

"You actually propose to me to encumber myself with a governess, a girl, and two children, in order to get little Dick taught his lessons?"

"Well, Felix, can you think of a better plan? It would be bringing these darlings close to their own family, and getting Dick looked after and taught for nothing. I do not mean to say that Mary Thimbleby is a nice child — far be it from me to deceive you. She is a stupid, uncomfortable girl, and how their mother, who was the sweetest woman — so managing, too — contrived to have such an uncomfortable child, I cannot think. It is something quite new in that family to produce a variety of the sort. But these subjects," continued Miss de Berenger, pushing back her loose curls, and putting on an air of wisdom and cogitation — "these subjects are as intricate as all others on the origin of species."

A gleam of joy shot across the dark face of Felix, but he remained silent, and his aunt continued.

"And as for Cecilia's marrying Carlos Tanner, of course that was very imprudent; but I cannot help taking an interest in him, considering, my dears, that I ought to have been his mother, and that, but for the fickleness of mankind, I should have been."

This was an old story.

"Never mind, Aunt Sarah," said Amias. "His father's wife lost all her fortune after he married her, and everybody said that served him right."

"And she had been a widow twice before he took her," observed Felix.

"Yes," said Aunt Sarah, much consoled; "and she was married in a brown gown — actually, my dears, in a brown gown. If he had married me, I should have had a white one."

"Well, then, I hope the wedding cake, instead of white, was done with brown sugar," continued Felix.

"For consistency's sake it should have been," answered Sarah; "but, my dears, we cannot expect consistency in this world! Yes!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THIS plan of Miss de Berenger's appeared to her nephew so preposterous, that he gave it no better reception than a somewhat ironical smile; then he finished his breakfast, and what more his aunt had to say he heard without receiving the sense. Yet, in less than one month, he was glad to carry out the whole scheme, almost to the letter.

In about a week he found that he was living precisely up to his income, and had nothing to spare for such contingencies as illness, nor anything to spend on Dick's education. At the same time, Miss de Berenger having said vaguely that no doubt little Dick would soon have a governess, a widow lady, a friend of hers, who lived half a mile off, came and proposed advantageous terms, if her son might come as a day pupil, and take his lessons with Dick. Her boy, she said, was lonely; he was delicate; he was her only child. Might he ride over on his pony? She was sure they should agree about terms.

On this hint Miss de Berenger spoke again, and got leave from Felix to write to Mrs. Snaith; which she did, proposing to the poor woman to come and live in a little cottage then vacant, and pay twenty pounds a year for the education of the two children.

Mrs. Snaith did not often laugh, but she laughed heartily when she got that letter; felt as if she had been politely invited to step into the lion's den, and put it aside, taking nearly a fortnight for considering the precise terms in which she could decline it.

But lo, at the end of that term scarlet fever broke out

in the farmhouse where Miss Price the governess lived, and she felt at once a longing desire to get away from the place. She only took her little cottage by the week; she could hire a cart to carry away her furniture to the station. She had spent a good deal of money on her late trip to the shore, and could not possibly afford another. How cheap this plan was — how easy! And, after all, no one but herself had any power over the children; no one could possibly prevent her taking them away again from these De Berengers whenever she chose.

She drew out the letter again. There was no time to be lost; one more day brought her news of another case of fever, and without loss of an hour she wrote a respectful letter to Miss de Berenger, setting forth that she would appear with the children the very next evening, and what little furniture she had should come with them.

Miss de Berenger had seldom been happier. She rushed to accept the widow's proposition, then she flew to arrange matters with Miss Thimbleby, which she did in such a satisfactory fashion, that this young lady was to receive a small salary for her services, together with vegetarian board, lodging, and leave to educate the little sister; Felix, on his part, taking the remainder of what Mrs. Snaith and the widow lady were to pay, so as to reimburse himself for his outlay, and pay also for the small quantity of cheap furniture that had to be bought, his main advantage being that he was to get his little brother taught and looked after for nothing.

It was an anxious and trying day for Mrs. Snaith that took her, her children, and her goods, to the new home. Several times during the course of it imagination transported her among the people she was going to. How would they receive her? What questions would they ask? She thought of them as excited also, as busy about her affairs, for Miss de Berenger had assured her that the little cottage should be swept down for her, and that she should find a comfortable supper ready there for herself and her little charge.

There was a certain amount of bustle, and some excitement also, that day at the parsonage; not in the minds of Felix or his brother, for they were gone out for the day; and not concerning Mrs. Snaith. If she could have known what it was that effaced her from their thoughts, it would have helped her, as such things always do, to realize how small the place was that she filled in creation.

It is hard sometimes, when one had thought that one's self and one's affairs were filling the minds of others, to find that one has been utterly forgotten; but it is positively humbling to discover, as is sometimes our lot, what a small, what an utterly worthless thing it was that blotted us out.

However, in this case, it cannot be said to have been a small thing — quite the contrary. It was a very large thing; there was the oddness of the matter. And how so large a thing could possibly be lost, missing, or mislaid, in such a scantily furnished house, was the whole mystery. The thing, in short, for sake of which Mrs. Snaith passed out of mind, was a clothes-basket.

Jolliffe, the servant, had looked all over for it, and was out of breath. A girl who had been blamed, and had wept in consequence, was now helping the others to express the common astonishment, and counting off on her fingers, as Jolliffe enumerated them, all the places, likely and unlikely, that had been looked into in vain.

A large bundle of clothes, ready tied up to be put into this basket, was lying in the mean time on the clean kitchen floor, and the washerwoman sat in judgment upon it, deciding that it was too heavy to be carried as it was, even with the help of her little boy, who, with his legs hanging down, sat regarding it with a sheepish and shamefaced air, as one so used to be accused, when any sort of mischief had been perpetrated, that he was expecting every moment to hear the loss of the basket confidently laid at his door.

Just then a youth, who had been hired to weed,

came clattering across the paved yard in his hobnailed boots.

"I forgot the loft," said Jolliffe; and she put her head out at the casement window. "Andrew, you go and look in the loft over the stable if the big clothes-basket is there."

"I know it can't be there, mem," answered the boy.

"I didn't ask you what you knew," said Mrs. Jolliffe, with the dignity of full conviction. "If it's not in a likely place, it stands to reason that it must be in an unlikely. You go and do as I bid you."

"Yes, mem," said the boy; and he burst into a chuckling laugh, and instantly was grave again.

"That boy Andrew is the awkwardest in the parish," continued Mrs. Jolliffe; "but when I say the basket couldn't have gone without hands, I don't mean but what his hands are clean, in a manner of speaking."

"It ain't there," said Andrew, returning, and chuckling again. Whereupon he was reproved by all parties for things in general, including his having been frequently seen to laugh even at his work, as if nothing was of any account; which, they observed, had very probably emboldened some tramp to carry off the missing article. He was then made to fetch the lightest wheelbarrow from the potato garden, and in that the clothes for the wash were solemnly wheeled away.

The soft shadows of evening were coming on, and everything about the parsonage was very still, when Miss de Berenger came bustling up to the kitchen door, calling for Dick.

"I cannot find him anywhere, Jolliffe. I want him to come this minute, and see his little cousins. They have just arrived at the cottage with their nurse, and I told them they should see him."

Jolliffe had been leaning out at the dairy window, talking to a market gardener, who also kept a shop in the neighboring town, in which he sold both fruit and grocery, and with whom Felix, under Miss de Berenger's advice, had made an agreement to exchange some of his superfluous fruit for tea and other groceries. She

now started forth, suddenly remembering that she had not seen Dick for a long time, the gardener following.

"Wherever can the dear child be!" she exclaimed. "I should have looked after him before, if I hadn't had those lettices on my mind. They've all come to their hearts at once; the dairy floor is all over green things that master cut for fear their heads should spread."

"That comes of the vegetable ladies," observed the gardener. "I'm sure I don't grudge anything its growth, — not but what I shall lose by all those apricots being ripe together."

"Wherever can the dear child be!" repeated Jolliffe. "Master Dick!" she shouted, "where are you? Come, it's supper time, and your aunt wants you, lovey."

A childish whoop answered, and was echoed from the old church tower, which was close to the garden.

"I can't tell where he is," she observed; "the sound seemed to come from all round." Then she turned to the cast, and exclaimed, "Why, goodness! — why, good gracious me, if ever I saw anything so strange in my life, Mr. Bolton! There's ever so many stars shining in the chestnut tree."

Mr. Bolton looked. There stood the great horse-chestnut tree, in all the splendor of its rich, deep foliage, and there certainly was a light shining between the leaves. Not the moon, for she hung a yellow crescent, that yielded no light at all; not Venus, for she, of all stars, was the only one out; but a warm orange, steady light that illuminated the whole centre of the tree, and shone through the leaves as well as between them.

The soft veil of the gloaming came on, and made this light every moment brighter; while such a silence seemed to gather and rise from under the trees, that Jolliffe and her companion, as they slowly and cautiously approached, did not care to speak. Then the woman hung back, the light looked so strange; and the man went under, looked up, and came back with a smile.

"I'll give you two guesses regarding what's up in that tree!" he exclaimed.

"Can't I see that it's a light?" cried Mrs. Jolliffe, with much impatience. "I don't see, though you have bought the fruit off the very walls, that I've any call to pick out answers for your riddles in master's own garden, at this time o' night."

"Of course it's a light," replied Mr. Bolton, "but what's the light *in?* Well, if you don't like to come any nigher, in regard of its being so close to the old churchyard, I'll tell you. It's in the old clothes-basket."

Jolliffe's surprise made her good-tempered. Again she came under the tree, and looked up. "This must be one of the dear child's antics," she observed; "but however in the world did he get it up there? Must be fifteen feet high. What a horrid dangerous trick!"

"I don't see that," answered Mr. Bolton. "He can climb like a cat. What he's done is this: he's drawn it up, do you see, by that long dangle of clothes-line to the fork where those three branches spread out, and there, as he stood above, he's managed to land it pretty steady, and he's tied it with the rope in and out among the boughs, and then he's fetched the stable lantern."

"And that boy Andrew helped him, I'll be bound!" exclaimed Mrs. Jolliffe. "I shouldn't wonder if he's in it now. Master Dicky dear, you'll speak to your own Jolly, won't you?"

A good deal of creaking was now heard in the wicker-work of the basket, but there was no answer.

"Oh, well, Mr. Bolton," remarked Mrs. Jolliffe, in a high-raised voice, "it's a clear case that he ain't here; I'd better go in and tell his brother that he's *lost.*"

A good deal more creaking, and something like a chuckle, was now heard in the basket, and presently over the edge peered the face of a great owl, a favorite companion of the child's.

It was dusk now under the tree, and the creature's

eyes glared in the light of the lantern. Mrs. Jolliffe, being startled, called him a beast; but he looked far more like the graven image of a cherub on a tomb, for nothing of him could be seen but his widespread wings and his face, while he looked down and appeared to think the visit of these two persons intrusive and unseasonable.

"Well, old goggle-eyes," quoth Mr. Bolton, "so you're there too, are you? If you know where your master is, which appears likely — for you're as cunning as many Christians, and full as ugly — you'd better tell him that, as sure as fate, we're going to fetch his brother out if he doesn't come down."

"Ay, that we are," added Mrs. Jolliffe. "Why, it'll be dark presently, and how is he to get down in the dark?"

The round, rosy face of little Dick was now reared up beside the face of the owl. He looked like a cherub too, but with a difference.

Mr. Bolton shook his head, and said rather gruffly, "Now, what are we to think of this here behavior? What with getting yourself lifted off your legs, a-ringing the church bells, and what with setting yourself fast in the chimney, climbing after jackdaws' nests, and what with sailing in the wash-tub, and what with getting yourself mixed up with the weights of the parish clock, you're a handful to your family, I do declare, and a caution to parties about to marry."

Instead of looking at all penitent, the little urchin only said, "But you won't *tell*, Jolly dear — you won't really tell?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Jolliffe, stolidly, "I shall tell; so now you know. And how anybody that's only to eat lettices and green meat generally is ever to conquer *you!* Of course I shall tell."

"Well, then, just throw up the cord," said the little fellow, "and I'll be down in a minute."

"I shouldn't wonder if that boy Andrew has been helping you," observed Mrs. Jolliffe. "If he has, it may be as much as his place is worth."

It was never worth more than ninepence a day; but the discussion was just then cut short by the sound of voices. Felix and his brother came down the grass walk.

"What's all this?" said Felix; but before Mrs. Jolliffe and Mr. Bolton had explained, he had taken in the whole matter, and what was more, he evidently thought nothing of it.

Amias brought a fruit-ladder, Felix called the little fellow down from his wicker nest, and when he was upon it and conveniently near, gave him a not unfriendly slap on his chubby person. "You had better look out, you little monkey," he remarked, in a casual and general sort of way. Little Dick said he would, and Felix, mounting the ladder, looked into the basket, saw the owl and the lantern, and a quantity of mown grass; also two books of fairy tales which Dick had been reading. He brought these last down and put out the light. "The basket is a good-for-nothing old thing," he observed to Jolliffe as he descended; "the child may as well be allowed to keep it."

Mrs. Jolliffe almost held up her hands. "Is that the way to bring up a child?" was her mental answer. "Well, after this week we shall wash at home, so it does not so much signify."

Felix was not half so fond of his little brother as a parent would have been, but he was, on the whole, nearly as indulgent. Dick, while he slowly retreated, heard permission given for him to keep the clothes-basket, but a ready instinct assured him that he would do well to retire from observation. He had other pieces of mischief on his mind beside the building of that child-nest in the tree, so he evaded his aunt when he heard her calling him, and creeping up to his little room, tumbled into bed and went to sleep as fast as possible.

He slept sweetly. So did not Mrs. Snaith, though she was much fatigued; a foreboding thought of impending questions haunted her. And as between ten and eleven o'clock the next morning she came forth from her tiny cottage to bring her little girls to the vicar-

age, her senses seemed to be sharpened both by the new scene and the leisure given her for remarking it.

Miss de Berenger had asked her to bring the children. As well then, she thought, as at some future time. The little creatures, exquisitely neat and clean, with sunny locks flowing under their limp white hats, walked on before her, while she, very plainly clad, came after, all in sober brown. She entered the parsonage gate, and there stood the vicar in his white gown; he had just been marrying a rustic couple at the church, and was leisurely divesting himself of this long white garment, which was so clean, that between the two great dark fir trees on the lawn it seemed almost to shine.

Felix came up when he saw the children, met them just as they reached the front door, and gave a hand to each; then addressed the nurse pleasantly. But, hardly noticing her answer, he seated himself on the outside of the dining-room window and cast attentive glances at his two little guests, who, unabashed and calm, looked at him with wide-open eyes of the sweetest blue-gray, and found it interesting to notice how the clerk was folding up that long white gown, and how a tame jackdaw had come hopping up to Felix, and was perching herself on his knee. Sometimes the children answered when Felix spoke, sometimes the nurse, but an inward trembling shook her. She had thought the shy anxieties of those few moments would soon be over; but no — far otherwise. She looked earnestly at the clergyman, at this Mr. Felix de Berenger, and she saw in his face no recognition, but a growing conviction made her more aware that she did not see him for the first time. A dark, thin man of middle height, a pleasant face — though rather an anxious one — thin features. And the hair? Well, what of the hair? Felix took off his hat presently, for the morning was warm; then rising, he turned the other side of his head towards her, as he called up at an open window, "Dick, Dick! Come down, you little monkey. Come; I want you." Yes, there it was, visible enough — one lock narrow, and perfectly white, among the otherwise umber waves of thick dark hair.

The nurse felt for the moment as if her heart stood still, and all was up with her. The curate! It was the curate who had been kind to her in her worst adversity, who had given her a shilling in the hop garden.

He showed no signs of recognition. How, indeed, should he know her again, or she fail to know him again? He was not altered in the least, and had, as she instantly remembered, seen many and many a poor creature since such as she had been. But she — her lean, gaunt figure was changed by several years of peace, comfort, and good living. She was inclined, for her age, to be rather stout now. She was very neatly and becomingly dressed, for in place of that flimsy faded clothing, she wore plain dark colors, and her shining hair was disposed in two close bands down her face.

She looked well into his eyes, impelled by her very fear to seek the worst at once. He did not know her. And now a lovely little boy in a pinafore was coming up; a dimpled creature as brown as a berry — hair, and eyes, and face — excepting where the clear crimson of the cheek showed through a little.

He was inclined to be very shamefaced. Amabel was not. She came up to him and gave him the usual greeting of infancy, a kiss. Then Delia slipped off Mr. de Berenger's knee, and after inspecting Dick for an instant, she also kissed him; and then the children smiled at one another all over their little faces, and, taking hands, walked off among the trees chattering.

Pretty little Dick! He was supremely happy that morning. The joy of their presence was as if two little child-angels had come to play with him. He made them welcome to all his best things; he also took them up the fruit-ladder to his nest. For more than four years after this, those beautiful nestlings spent their happiest hours in it.

But on this first climb into it they were aided by Andrew, who had originally helped Dick to tie the basket safely, and was now very impressive with all the children. "They were on no account to go up, nor down neither, without his help; they were to promise solemnly

that they never would — to promise *as sure as death.*" So they did, knowing and caring about death nothing at all. But they knew they were happy — Dick especially — and he fell easily and at once under the influence of their sex, and never so long as he lived escaped from it any more.

The leaves were very thick underneath them, so that they could not be seen from below. But they could see the great shining face of the church clock, the rooks leading off their second brood, the white road winding on through the heathery common, and far beyond a little hill in old Sir Sam's park, on the slope of which does and fawns were lying half hidden by the bracken.

In the mean time Mrs. Snaith, little aware what they were about, had been introduced by Jolliffe to the clean kitchen, and there, after a good deal of polite haggling, as, "Well, ma'am, I'm sure it's a shame," and "Well, ma'am, I couldn't bear myself sitting with my hands before me," had been accommodated with an apron, and allowed to make herself useful by stringing and slicing beans. The party had been invited to an early dinner at the parsonage, and there were rabbits and parsley sauce to prepare, and there were late red currants to strip from the stalks for a fruit pudding. Aided by the circumstance that they had something to do, the ladies soon became friendly, and talked of such subjects as really interested them.

"Well, it *is* a very small cottage, ma'am; there you're right."

"And in lodgings you're saved a vast of trouble, so that if it wasn't for the dripping — "

"Ah, indeed; you may well mention that, ma'am. Why, not one in ten of those landladies is to be depended on."

Mrs. Snaith assented.

"And to sit in your parlor," she continued, "and know as well as can be that they're making their own crusts with your dripping, and that you mayn't go down to see it, is enough to spoil the best of tempers and the least particular."

They were rather a large party at dinner, for the new governess and her young sister had arrived, and Felix, as he sat at the head of the table, had only just marshalled them, said grace, and begun to wonder how the one young servant of the establishment would wait upon them all, when Mrs. Snaith appeared, carrying in the first dish, which she set before him and uncovered, as if she was performing some ordinary and looked-for duty.

"Mrs. Snaith!" he exclaimed.

"I should wish it, if you please, sir, whenever my young ladies is here," she replied calmly.

A very convenient wish, and she began to carry it out with a quiet and homely dignity that he much admired, every now and then giving the gentlest motherly admonition to the children, including little Dick. Felix had a certain fear of a lady; womanhood was sufficiently alarming to him without fine clothes, accomplishments, and a polished and self-possessed manner. He found himself most attracted by a good woman who was without these extraneous advantages; this homely dignity and unruffled humility pleased him, and commanded his respect. He let Mrs. Snaith alone, and under her auspices the dinner went on pleasantly to its conclusion.

Little Amabel and her sister won great approval by their sweet looks and pretty behavior at that dinner. They had been well taught, and could conduct themselves perfectly well at table.

Felix regarded them with attention; they were graceful, they were fair, but he saw no special likeness to old Sir Sam's family.

The children had, in fact, been helped, by their mother's intense sympathy, to the inheritance of a certain pensive wistfulness that was in their father's soul and countenance; the reflection of it was in their faces — only in their faces — and even there it appeared more as the expression of a sentiment than of a passion, that abiding passion of regret for his lameness that the bad, beautiful youth was always brooding over. When their lovely little faces were at rest, and no smiles rip-

pled over them, their mother could often see that look, a witness to their father's sorrow and their mother's pity; it gave a strange, and to her a very touching, interest to both the children. There was an unusual contrast between the still deeps in their lucid, grave blue eyes, and the rosy lips, so dimpled and waggish, so ready to soften and smile, and show a mouthful of pearls.

"Well, Felix, well, Amias," said Miss de Berenger, when this dinner was over, and she was left alone with her two nephews, "I suppose you will both admit that I have brought a treasure into the family. Yes! How well that woman waits! What a sight the great heaps of potatoes must have been for her, and the cabbages and the buttered beans that Ann and Mary consumed! I call to mind now your dear father asking me if I remembered a dinner we were at once, at their mother's. 'Remember it!' I exclaimed. 'Ay, thou poor ghost of a meal, while memory holds her place in an empty stomach.' I was inspired to say it, just as Shakespeare was at first, though in general I am not at all poetical. And then the tipsy cake she gave us in the evening! It was a tremendous falsehood to call it by such a name. Tipsy, indeed! How was a whole cake to get tipsy on one glass of South African wine? You need not look so wise, Amias; a degrading thing, I suppose you'll say, to make fun of even a dumb cake, when it's drunk," proceeded Miss de Berenger, after a pause. "As if there could be real fun in the inebriation of anything whatever. Yes! Why, how very ridiculous you two are! I never saw such risible fellows in my life. And you a clergyman, too, Felix! What can you be laughing at now?"

While this conversation took place in the garden, and while the children played together, and the vegetarians, walking between thick hedges of peas and beans, and ridges of new potatoes, felt that they had come into a land of fatness and plenty, Mrs. Snaith, helping to wash the glass in the neat kitchen, was made welcome to a good deal of information that no amount of ques-

tioning would have procured for those in a different station of life to her informers.

These were Mr. Bolton, who had just stepped up to gather some early summer jennetings, but out of delicacy forbore to take them under the eyes of Felix, and so waited till he should come in; and Mrs. Jolliffe, who in dismissing the washerwoman, after counting out the clean clothes she had brought home, took occasion, with patronizing suavity, to recommend her to the newcomer as a very honest woman, and a good hand at getting up children's clothes.

Mrs. Snaith said she would employ her, and the grateful and respectful thanks that she and Jolliffe both received opened the heart of the latter still further, so that as the little woman retreated across the yard her praises followed her.

"An honest little woman, and industrious too, Mrs. Snaith; and has lately got the laundry work of the clerks at the brewery. Still, as she said to me, 'Mrs. Jolliffe,' said she, 'there's no sweet without its bitter, and most of those gentlemen air such extra large sizes, that I feel it hard I should hev to do justice to their shirts, at twopence-halfpenny apiece, when I should hev hed the same money if they'd been smaller.'"

"Her present husband is not to complain of for his size," observed Mr. Bolton.

"No, but that was a conveniency," quoth Mrs. Jolliffe; "and, for aught I know, the conveniency helped to decide her, as such things very frequently do, and no harm neither."

Mrs. Jolliffe spoke with such a meaning smile, that Mrs. Snaith testified some curiosity, whereupon she continued.

"For, as I said, a prudent little woman she was. Her first husband's Sunday coat was laid by as good as new; so she took and cut it smaller for her second to be married in, and very respectable he looked in it, and it saved money. And why not, Mr. Bolton?" she inquired, with a certain sharpness of reproof in her voice.

"Why not, indeed!" answered Mr. Bolton, hasten-

ing to agree, though at first his face had assumed a slightly sarcastic expression. Then, on reflection, he veered round to his first thought. "But it don't seem a feeling thing to do, neither."

"Feeling!" quoth Mrs. Jolliffe, in the tone of one who makes a telling retort. "You and I can't talk together about feelings, and hope to agree at all. Some folks have most feeling for that that can hold up its head and stop at home, which is my case. I don't pretend to understand them whose feeling is for that that must run away."

Here both Mrs. Jolliffe and Mr. Bolton laughed, and Mrs. Snaith was appealed to in words that confused and startled her, for they seemed to hint at her wretched husband's condition, as if the speaker knew all about it.

"When the law has got hold of a man, that man is not, therefore, to be cried down by me, and never shall be. No, nor by you neither, ma'am, as your actions make evident."

Mrs. Snaith flushed and trembled, but said nothing, and with what relief, and what gratitude for it, she heard the rest of the conversation, neither of those who marked her rising color could have the least idea.

"Now, my feelings go across the water. What's old Sam to me?"

"That you should talk of him so disrespectful, almost at his own gates!"

"Why not?" replied Mr. Bolton. "Do I owe him for a single drop of his beer, either given me or sold to me?"

"Right well you know that he'd have lost his seat if he'd given any away at the last election."

"Right well I do know it. For all that, old Sam, as I was saying, never gives a pleasant word to his neighbors. And never was a freer, friendlier man than Mr. John, and free and friendly is he treated now by me and by others. Does he find any difficulty in getting intelligence of all he wants to know? I should say not. Why, Mrs. Snaith, Mr. John has more than one corre-

spondent here, that knows as much about him as maybe I do, and maybe you do."

"Mr. John?" exclaimed Mrs. Snaith, now breathing freely. "Oh, Mr. John de Berenger it were that you spoke of?"

"Why, yes," said Mr. Bolton, looking at her with some admiration for what he considered an excellently feigned surprise. "Mr. John de Berenger, of course. Who else?"

CHAPTER IX.

OLD Sir Sam, as people called him, otherwise Sir Samuel Simcox de Berenger, was in some respects a particularly agreeable man. He had some undesirable qualities, but from the first he had been so strangely dealt with by circumstances, by nature, and by providence, so drawn on through the natural openings made by other men's mistakes, that if he had been any better, he would have been a hero; and that he certainly was not.

Most people thought he was a great deal richer than he ought to have been, and yet he had never taken a shilling but what the laws of his country accorded to him.

His own father, having two sons, had taken him, the elder, into partnership, and given him a share in his great brewery business. The younger had gone into the army, obtaining the father's consent, though it was very reluctantly given.

This second son had married very young, and left three children, one of whom was the father of Felix, and another his aunt, Sarah de Berenger. To her the old grandfather had given a handsome fortune during his lifetime — had, in short, settled upon her a small estate, which had come into the family by the female side, so that she was much better off than her two brothers; for when, after his younger son's death, the old man also died, it was found that, owing to some fatal informality in the will, the representatives of the younger branch could not possess themselves of that interest in his business and his property which he had always expressed himself as intending to leave them.

Sir Samuel, without a lawsuit, was evidently master of all. He took immense pains to get the best legal opinions, and confidently expected that his two nephews would try the case. Being a pugnacious man, he looked forward to a fair fight, not without a certain amount of pleasure and excitement.

Perhaps the two nephews took counsel's opinion also; but however that might be, they never gave him a chance of fighting. Instead of going to law, they took themselves off, left him to swallow up all, and maintained themselves independently of him and his business.

There is little doubt that he would have been, to a great extent, the conqueror, if there had been a suit. In such a case, he would have held his head high, and also have done something for his late brother's family; but when he found that he was left master of the situation without a suit, and also without a reconciliation, he felt it. To win in open fight is never so necessary to the comfort and pride of the winner, if he is right, as if he is wrong.

While Sir Samuel was considering that, though these nephews could make good no claim at law, yet they ought to have *something*, one of them chanced to die without a will, and he chose to consider himself the young man's heir-at-law. That is to say, he reflected that the dead nephew, having been the elder of the two, ought to have had, if he had lived, a double share; he would certainly have given him a double share. So he divided off that portion of his possessions as having been destined for his nephew, and he always called it, "What I came in for, in consequence of poor Tom's premature death." Thus that claim settled itself.

The other nephew, the father of Felix, never quarrelled with him, but rather seemed to set him at nought. Yet he felt that he must do his duty by him. To that end, he informed him that he should take his second son, then an infant, into the business; which in due time he did, with what results has already been explained.

He never had any thanks from the father of the baby,

who went to India before the future brewer could run alone; but he occasionally called the child "Small-beer," by which he made it evident that Sir Samuel had leave to carry out his noble intention if he pleased. Sir Samuel felt that too; for though he retained all the material advantage that had come of the unlucky will, he none the less fretted under a sense of the contempt that he knew his nephew held him in, and was always particularly cautious what he said, lest he should provoke an answer.

So he lived in the exercise of a certain self-control, feeling it, in general, politic to be bland and obliging to his nephew; and this, to a man of his choleric nature, was galling. At the same time, he took all opportunities of being affectionate and useful to his niece Sarah, who, being herself very well off, felt her brother's poverty the less keenly, and was often inclined to identify herself with the rich side of the family, as finding riches a great thing to have in common. Sarah lost both her brothers in their comparative youth. As for Felix, her nephew, his was a grievance once removed — an old story. His great-uncle, for a time, had been very kind to Amias — had, in fact, shown a decided affection for him; it was as well now to let the old great-grandfather's will be forgotten.

Felix was helped in his wish to let it pass into the background, by his liking for old Sir Samuel's sons, the youngest of whom was only one year his own senior; for Sir Samuel had married somewhat late in life, so that his sons and his great-nephews were contemporaries.

And now two little girls had appeared upon the scene, to Sir Samuel's great surprise and very natural annoyance. His great-nephew had been the cause of their coming; and Miss de Berenger had told him pointedly that they were his grandchildren.

He was secretly enraged with Felix — would like to have had an encounter with him about it; the more so as he felt inclined to believe it was so.

No one knew so well as himself how utterly in the

wrong his favorite son had always been in his quarrels with him. In fact, his affection for the scapegrace had enabled him to endure a vast deal that any father would have found hard, and in hope of winning, and then retaining him, to be almost subservient and long-indulgent.

But the favorite had got into debt many times after being brought home and freed. Finally, the father had been obliged to send him from home on an allowance, and John had actually gambled away great part of his interest even in that.

His father knew he had somehow deeply entangled himself, but knew not all. Sometimes he got a hint from Felix, to whom, at rare intervals, John still wrote, for as boys the two had been friends. When Sir Samuel found that Felix was arranging for the education of these little De Berengers, he felt how hard it was that his son should confide in a cousin rather than in himself, and he waited a week, in confident expectation that Felix would lay a case before him, declare that these were his grandchildren, and make some demand on him for money; he intended to dispute every inch of the ground, not give a shilling, unless the fact was fully proved, and even then beat Felix down to the lowest sum he could possibly be induced to accept. But the week came to an end, and Felix said not a word.

Everybody declared that these two little girls were the image of John. He felt a devouring anxiety to see them, for he was an affectionate old fellow. He had vowed to himself that they were none of his, and that, as John had acknowledged no marriage, it could be no duty of his to take upon him the great expense of their maintenance; but here they were at his gates, and he longed to see them.

He asked Felix whether they had asked after him.

"How should they, uncle," exclaimed Felix, "when they never heard of your existence?"

"Why — why," stuttered Sir Samuel, "don't they know anything at all about — the family?"

"Evidently not. One of them can talk plainly, and

she seems, so far as I can judge, to know nothing about any of us."

"I would have done well by them, John," muttered the old man, as he drove home with an aching heart; "but you never had any bowels toward your old father. Why, look here; he flings his children at me, without so much as asking me for my blessing on them!"

The next day, about one o'clock, little Amabel and little Delia were seated on two high chairs at the table, in their tiny cottage, and waiting for their dinner, when an old gentleman looked in at the open door, smiled, nodded to them, and then came inside, taking off his hat and putting it on the window-sill among the flower-pots. A nice old gentleman, with white hair and white eyebrows. The little girls returned his nod and smiles, then the elder lifted up her small, high voice, and called through the open door that led to the little back kitchen, "Mrs. Naif, Mrs. Naif!" A cheery voice answered, and then the younger child tried her skill as a summons. "Mrs. Naif, dear! Make haste, Mrs. Naif! Company's come to dinner."

Mrs. Snaith presently appeared with a good-sized rice pudding, and set it on the table, which was graced with a clean cloth.

Sir Samuel greeted her when she curtsied, "Good morning, ma'am. You are the nurse here, I presume?"

"Yes, sir, I am."

"Will you be seated, and allow me just to look on awhile."

Mrs. Snaith sat down, and helped the little ones to their pudding. The elder was inclined to be slightly shy, the younger, pulling Mrs. Snaith by the sleeve, pointed at Sir Samuel with her spoon, and whispered some loving confidences in her ear.

"What does she say?" asked Sir Samuel.

The nurse smiled. "She says, sir, 'Give the company some pudding.'"

"Does she, pretty lamb?" exclaimed the old baronet, with a sudden access of fervor; then recollecting himself, and noticing that the nurse was startled, and col-

ored slightly, he said, by way of continuing his sentence, "I didn't exactly catch your name, I think?"

"Mrs. Snaith, sir."

"Yes, her name's Mrs. Naith every day," said the little Amabel, "but when she's very good we call her Mamsey."

"Her name's Mamsey when she gives us strawberries and milk," the other child explained. "But she hasn't got a black face, company," she continued, addressing him earnestly, as if it behooved him to testify to the truth of her words.

"A black face!" exclaimed the puzzled guest.

Mrs. Snaith explained. "There were some American children with a black nurse, sir, at the seaside where we've been. They called her Mamsey, and so these little dears imitated them."

By this time it was evident that the nurse was ill at ease; she perceived the deep interest with which her unbidden guest watched the children's words and ways. Her pride as a mother was not deceived with any thought that this was a tribute to their beauty or infantile sweetness; she knew this must be the rich man, the great man of the place, who was held in that peculiar respect which merit and benevolence can never command. People say of Eastern nations, that those who would hold sway over them must needs make themselves feared, and they do not enough consider that this is almost as true at their own doors as it is at the ends of the earth. When the villagers had nodded and whispered in her presence, mysteriously hinting that anybody at a glance could see who these children were, though she would not answer any questions, she had inwardly felt that the great and proud man whom they had in their thoughts would know better, that he would write to his son, who would at once reply that he knew nothing about these children, and there would be an end.

But here sat Sir Samuel, gazing at Amabel and Delia with a scrutiny sometimes keen, sometimes almost tender. He was making them prattle; he was at last actually drawing his wooden chair to the table, and, at their

desire, partaking of the new potatoes which concluded their meal.

He took so little notice of her that she had no need to speak; and that homely dignity which was natural to her coming to her aid, she rose and began to wait on the children and their guest, moving in and out between the little front room where they were dining and the tiny kitchen behind; marking all the old man's efforts to please the small coquettes, and how easily they were won, and how engaging they were; and how noisy the canary was, bustling about in his cage, and singing every time they laughed, as if he longed for some attention too; how the pale, overblown roses outside let their dropping leaves float in and drift over the tablecloth.

For the first time in her life, as she stood in the back kitchen, with hands pressed in one another, listening, she felt a jealous pang, not of her darlings themselves, but of the refined grace and delicate beauty which had so played into her hands as to make the part she had chosen for herself easy.

It was easy to play the part of their nurse — she had elected to play it — and yet her mother's heart resented its being always taken for granted that she could be nothing more.

"I fare almost afraid they'll despise me when they get a bit older," she thought. "If they do, dear lambs, I must take them away from these gentlefolks before it's too late."

Sir Samuel calling her, she came in and found Amabel on his knee. The brown face of little Dick was seen; he was leaning in at the casement, and Delia, leaning out, was kissing him.

Beautiful little Dick was as happy about that time as anything that breathes can be. When they saw him Sir Samuel lost the attention of the other children.

They must have their sun-bonnets on. Mamsey must reach them down.

"Did they love him? Would they like to see him again?"

Oh yes, they liked him, they liked him very much, but they wanted to go now with Dick; and presently they all three set forth together down the quiet road to the vicarage, leaving Sir Samuel and Mrs. Snaith alone.

He was sitting in the Windsor chair, lost in thought, and looking after the children as well as the clustering rose-branches would let him.

She stood a moment expecting him to speak, but he did not; and, unable to bear inaction, she fetched in a tray, and when he looked round, she was quietly clearing the table, placing the remains of the simple dinner upon it.

He got up and she paused.

"You have behaved with great discretion," he said with energy; "and the reticence which I hear you have displayed — the refusing, I mean, to answer people's idle questions — has my entire approval, — I may say, commands my respect."

Mrs. Snaith was silent.

"I am quite aware," he continued, "of all that passed between you and Miss de Berenger. I do not see that even she had a right to expect a full account of matters from you; but — but" — here he paused, baffled by the nurse's grave silence — "but the excellent care with which you fulfil your trust deserves my thanks, and, as I said before, your refusal to answer idle questions commands my respect."

"Thank you, sir. It is my wish to keep quiet, and I don't fare to think I have any call to answer questions."

"But if I asked you some," he answered, a little startled, "of course it would be different."

"I beg your pardon. Not at all different, sir."

"I am Sir Samuel de Berenger, Mr. John de Berenger's father. Now what do you say?"

"Nothing, Sir Samuel."

"Nothing! You're ordered to keep silence, even to me?"

"Sir, I never said I were under orders. I am not."

"Nonsense."

"And I ask your pardon, sir; but if you know all I said to Miss de Berenger, you know all I ever shall say."

"Why, you foolish woman, you are enough to provoke a saint! You quite mistake your employer's meaning. What are you afraid of? What do you mean? Do you think you are to deny to *me* whose and what these children are? It's contrary to all reason — contrary to my son's obvious meaning; clean against their interest. Why, it's — I never met with such folly in my life!"

Here Sir Samuel launched into certain violent denunciations against folly in general, and this fool in particular; but as she did not further enrage him by making any reply, but helplessly gazed at him while he stormed at her, on the other side of the table, he soon managed to calm himself sufficiently to recur to the matter in hand.

"And whatever may be your motive, I tell you, there's no more use than there is reason in your present line of conduct. It's no use your denying to *me* that these are my grandchildren, I can see it in their faces. It's no use your denying to *me* that they were thrown in my niece's way on purpose that I might hear of them. No, don't speak, woman — it's my turn to speak now. I tell you all that stuff is of no use; I am not to be deceived."

In the energy of his indignation he leaned over the table and shook his fist at her, and reddened to the roots of his snowy hair; while she, pale and doubtful, continued to find safety only in silence. Every moment for thought seemed to be something won; but she won many, and he had checked himself, and sat down again in his Windsor chair, and was fuming there in more quiet fashion, while, still standing with her hand upon the tray, she was searching for some reply.

At last he said with a sigh, as if something in his own mind had checked him as much as her behavior, "Perhaps the poor lambs were not born in wedlock."

"Oh yes, they were," she answered, sharply and

decidedly; "that's a question I'd answer to anybody, let him be who he would."

"You can prove your words?"

"I could, if there was any need, Sir Samuel."

"Makes nothing of me — cares nothing what I think. But you never did, John. *If there was any need!*"

"You have a son, sir, *by what I can make out*," said the nurse, finishing her sentence with a certain emphasis.

"Oh yes — a son; his conduct looks like a son. You know well enough that I have a son. What of him?"

"If you'll give me leave to advise you, sir —"

"Well?"

"Well, sir, though I don't know the gentleman, I fare to think that if you wrote to him he would answer like a gentleman, and tell you —"

"Tell me what?"

"What would get the mistake out of your head, sir."

"I don't know where to find him."

"Indeed, sir," she answered slowly; "then worse luck for me! And yet," she continued, as if in deep cogitation, "there are those not very far off that do know."

Sir Samuel did not at all doubt her word, but he answered with the surprise he really felt at her making such an admission.

"You don't say so!"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"If I write a letter to my son and bring it to you, will you promise to direct it to him?" exclaimed the old baronet.

He regarded this admission as tantamount to a confession of all, and she, considering, on the contrary, that the letter would be so answered as to put an end to all, gave her consent.

"I'm not that certain about it, sir, that I can promise, but I will do my best."

He sat a few minutes longer, thinking and calming himself, then rose and put on his gloves, looking at her, meanwhile, almost with a smile in his eyes. "You are

a remarkably inconsistent woman," he observed, but not at all rudely.

"Sir!"

"I said, Mrs. Snaith — But, pooh! what is the good of arguing? Do you want any money?" he added sharply, and at the same time pulling out his purse.

"No, sir," she answered, coloring and drawing back.

"Well, if you should, you'll know whom to come to; and I'll send you down the letter to-morrow. Good morning."

"Good morning, Sir Samuel," said Mrs. Snaith. And even to those simple words she seemed to impart an air of thoughtfulness and caution.

He went away without the shadow of a doubt in his mind that these little girls were his grandchildren; and he did not consider, what was not the less perfectly certain, that if their nurse had made a claim on him, and come to the village demanding that he should acknowledge and assist them, he would have required ample proof of their rights in him, and perhaps not have been at all cordial to them at first, though this had been forthcoming.

As to the likeness. His son was a small, fair man. Absence and love had done a good work for his face in his father's recollection. These small, fair creatures were like what he had been in complexion as a child, but their dimpled features and dark eyelashes were far different. Yet Sir Samuel, reflecting on their sweet little faces, absolutely felt, not only that they recalled his son's childhood, but that he had almost forgotten, till he saw them, what a pretty and engaging little fellow his son had been as a child.

CHAPTER X.

THE next morning Sir Samuel's carriage stopped again at the door of the tiny cottage. A footman got down, went in, and soon came back to his master, with "The nurse's respects, Sir Samuel, and I was to say, if you wished to see the young ladies, they are up at the vicarage doing their lessons."

"I should like to see *her*."

"She hopes you'll excuse her, Sir Samuel; she is making bread, and has her hands in the dough."

Sir Samuel alighted, with the smallest of brown paper parcels in his hand, and sought Mrs. Snaith in her little clean back kitchen. "I thought, Mrs. Snaith, I need not trouble you to go all the way — a mile or more — to the post with this. I can post it for you."

"Oh, sir, it will be no trouble, thank you kindly; I have to walk over to the shop."

"If you'll give me pen and ink, I'll direct it, then." He looked about, but saw nothing excepting the copper before which Mrs. Snaith was standing, with both hands plunged into the bread-pan.

Mrs. Snaith, blushing, said she had no pen and ink, but, if he would leave the letter, it would go all right. "It's not often I have to write anything," she continued, as if excusing herself; "and my little ladies do their copies at Mr. de Berenger's."

He half smiled, perceiving that his device for obtaining the direction had for the present failed.

"I'll see that it go all right, sir," she repeated.

He was too proud to sue for what he wanted.

"So be it, then," he answered; took a letter from

the brown paper covering and laid it on the clean edge of the copper. "I shall be much obliged to you," he said, as he retired. "You'll let me pay for the stamp, of course?"

"How simple she is!" he thought. "She might just as well have told me my poor boy's address, considering how easy it will be for me to find it out at the post-office."

But it did not prove so easy. In less than a quarter of an hour Mr. Bolton passed, with a light cart full of vegetables that he had brought from the parsonage, and Mrs. Snaith, coming out to him, asked him if he would oblige a neighbor by getting that letter sent to Mr. John de Berenger.

Mr. Bolton turned the letter over and over several times, and looked critically at the paper and curiously at Mrs. Snaith.

"I'll never breathe a word to any soul, if you will, Mr. Bolton, how it was, or who it was that got it done for me," she pleaded.

Still Mr. Bolton paused and seemed to cogitate.

So she urged him further. "I've been that annoyed lately about him, that I can't bear myself till I get things explained."

"Well, you'll observe," answered Mr. Bolton, answering what he supposed to be her thought, but in fact only his own false supposition — "you'll observe that there's no post-office in nature equal to ours for sureness; and likewise, if you want a letter to be forwarded, you must write *that* in their foreign words; also you should never put 'esquire' on a letter that's to go abroad — they're apt to mistake the word for a man's name. And you've always got to prepay a foreign letter."

Mrs. Snaith produced a shilling, and to her surprise received only sixpence change, but she was too polite to make any remark; and, having given Mr. Bolton the letter, hastened to escape from a subject almost sure to lead to questioning.

"And how is your good lady, Mr. Bolton? I saw

her on Saturday in the shop, looking as fresh as a rose."

"Fresh she is!" answered Mr. Bolton with enthusiasm. He had lately married a wife many years younger than himself. "Fresh she is, and always pleased. What her father said has come true. 'Cornelius,' says the old gentleman (he's in the shoe line), 'Cornelius, you'll find her a rare one to make you laugh; her cheerful temper is as good as a daily blow out.'"

Mrs. Snaith, considering this a vulgar compliment, instinctively drew herself up; but the proud husband was spared any observation of her silent disapproval, for at that instant the horse, perhaps thinking he had waited long enough in the sun, suddenly started down the road at a good pace, and Mr. Bolton, after calling to him in vain to stop, had to run after him. Mrs. Snaith only remained outside till he was seated and had the reins in his hand, then went in, glad to have got the letter forwarded, but with a lowered opinion of Mr. Bolton, as rather countrified and common, considering what a good shop he had, and that he kept the post-office.

Sir Samuel, who was not at all in the habit of shopping, went into Mr. Bolton's shop the next day, feigning to want some melon-seed, of which he ordered a ridiculously large quantity, and then asked Mrs. Bolton what foreign letters had been posted that day, or the day before.

It appeared that no foreign letters whatever had been posted for more than a fortnight.

Sir Samuel brought himself to say, "I have lost my son's (Mr. John de Berenger's) address; if one directed to him should be posted, will you kindly copy the address for me?"

"I will, Sir Samuel," said young Mrs. Bolton; and when her husband came in, she related to him what had passed.

"Lost the address, have the old gentleman?" quoth Mr. Bolton, calmly. "Well, now, his gardener won't

put those melon-seeds in, I know, but they must be sent. Only think of old Sam's losing the address!"

"It's a pity but what he was more careful," observed Mrs. Bolton; and so few letters passed through her hand, that it gave her no trouble to keep this request in mind.

Four days passed. "John's not in England," thought Sir Samuel, "or I should have had an answer before now." Two more days passed. "John's not in France," thought Sir Samuel. A fortnight. "John's not in Italy, nor in Germany either." Six weeks. "John's not in the States — at least, anywhere near the seaboard — nor in Canada."

Three more months, and a letter from Ceylon, in John's handwriting, was lying on his table. It was dated from a small place up the country, among the coffee plantations; was a very satisfactory letter on the whole, but the father soon saw, both by the date and the contents, that his son had not yet received the important letter. With a certain moderation of compunction which, however, satisfied Sir Samuel, he expressed his regret that his family, and his father in particular, had no better reason to be proud of him. He hoped to do better; had got employment that maintained him, and should write from time to time. This was a very hot place — steaming hot; in fact, he had to have a black boy standing beside him while he shaved, to wipe the dew that every few minutes gathered and clouded the looking-glass. The boots he took off at night were covered in the morning with mould. But there was plenty of alligator shooting; he and some other fellows had shot two the week before. This was on the third page. His father went on to the end, which, with a description of how the other fellows who were newly come out "funked" when they saw a serpent, ended rather abruptly, "Your affectionate son, JOHN DE BERENGER."

Sir Samuel's heart was appeased; both his pride and his affection soothed themselves over this letter. "The boy has not forgotten me; and he means to do better. Well, well, he has sown his wild oats. He will make

me proud of him after all. Been in Ceylon six weeks, after stopping at Heidelberg all the winter. Ah!"

In the mean time Ann Thimbleby fulfilled her task of education as well as she knew how; she was lucky enough to take sufficient interest in it to induce her to make experiments, and when one failed she tried another. At that time her inquisitive mind was much exercised on the subject of etymology, but the pains she took to instil some liking for it into the minds of her two elder pupils, bore no fruit, excepting to make them like playing with words, while the little ones became familiar with a few uncommon expressions, which they used glibly in their childish talk.

"He's a greedy, *nefarious* boy," said Amabel to Sir Samuel, speaking of Dick; "and we're not friends with him."

Sir Samuel had come to see the children; he was seated in a chair on the parsonage lawn when she said this, and a slight stirring five feet from the ground, in the great fir tree, made him cast up an inquiring glance, and observe Dick looking out, shamefaced and red.

"What has he been about?" asked the old man, more to make the fair little creature talk than with any interest in Dick's delinquency.

"Coz gave each of us a sugared almond," said Amabel, pouting. "I said, 'Dick, you may take a bite of mine,' and he — Oh, Dick, you *in-principled* boy, you gobbled it all up — and now," she continued, with deep melancholy, "I can never get it back."

Dick felt at that moment as much shame as mortals can feel for any delinquency whatever, shame being born with us full grown, and beginning, as a rule, to wax feeble before we have the truest cause to feel it. He wondered how it could have come to pass that he had done an action so utterly to be despised — wondered whether it would be forgotten by the time he was grown up — and felt, though he was not equal to the expression of such a thing, that his future prospects were blasted, and his young life nipped as by a spring blight. How could he ever show his face again!

He moved uneasily on his branch, hiding himself among the thick greenery, and with dreary compunction listened to the conversation below, which was very friendly and confiding. But could he believe his ears? In spite of what had unfortunately occurred, the old uncle in a very few minutes was actually calling to him.

"Come down, you little scaramouch; come here, I say. Do you see what this is?"

A whole shilling! Not a new one, it is true, but good for buying things with. Evidently for him! There was a reprieve. He descended, blushing with beautiful confusion, took it, darted out of the gate with it to a cottage below Mrs. Snaith's, and returned, almost able to hold up his head, with a goodly quantity of "bull's-eyes" screwed up in paper.

These articles of commerce have almost disappeared from any but village shops. They are round lumps of sugar, flavored with peppermint, and marked across with blue and red bands.

Dick squatted down beside Amabel, and opened the screw of paper. Sir Samuel was just thinking that she was a far lovelier child than *her father* had ever been.

"No," said the little creature, declining this peace-offering, "I don't like them, Dick; when I open my mouf they make my tongue feel so cold."

She turned away her face — but "*how useful it is to have money!*"

"You're cross," said Dick. "I'm very sorry. Do kiss me this once and make it up."

"I don't want to kiss you," said Amabel.

"Do," pleaded Dick. "Well, if you will, *I'll give you the other sixpence!*"

There was the sixpence in his hand. Amabel looked at it — paused, relented. "If you'll go with me to the shop to spend it," she said, "I will."

Thereupon the two children kissed each other, and being now good friends again, left the bull's-eyes on the grass and ran off together through the vicarage gate; while the giver of the shilling was left to amuse himself with little dimpled Delia, who, seated on his knee, an-

swered his questions about the sea-side, and her lessons and Mamsey, as well as she knew how.

A certain tenderness towards the children softened his heart, and made him feel younger again. The love of money gave way before it to a sufficient degree for the decision which he had formed, that they should never want for anything. Little Delia's lisping tongue reminded him of the infantile talk of his own sons in their childhood. He had taken no interest in, and made few observations on, other children, therefore, when the behavior of Amabel and Delia stirred in him slumbering recollections of his own nursery, he regarded this as a proof of likeness to his family, and did not know that such were the common ways and wiles, and this was the ordinary English of childhood in general.

"But the motive," thought Sir Samuel, when, having mounted his horse, he went slowly along the shady road that led from the vicarage past the nurse's, and past two or three other cottages, towards his own gate — "the motive. No human being acts without a motive, and I cannot see the motive, however mistaken, that induces this woman to deny that these are John's children. Why, they're as like him as they can stare; and I could declare, when I see their little ways and hear them lisp, that it's my own boys over again." He paused, then went on slowly. "He might, to be sure, have threatened her that, if she told, he would stop the supplies — for, of course, he was always in imminent danger of being arrested whenever he came to see them; but he sailed about the time that she brought them here, no doubt by his orders. Well, I must wait. It is still *just possible* they may not be his, after all (pooh! it's not possible, though). However, he will not be long in letting me know. And considering that I've offered to take the whole charge of them, and provide for them too, if they are — Here comes Felix, looking as if he had the weight of the world on his shoulders. — Well, nephew parson, how are you?"

Felix observed a certain familiar way in the greeting, a cordiality that he was not accustomed to. Not to be

outdone, he shook hands with his uncle when the old man stopped his horse, and asked where he could have been riding during the hottest hours of such a hot day.

Sir Samuel told him; went a little from the subject to remark, in a casual way, that one of the little girls looked pale, and then said abruptly, "I suppose I shall have to send her to the sea."

Now, Felix knew that John de Berenger had written to his father. "Has John acknowledged them, then?" he exclaimed with vehemence.

Sir Samuel admitted that he had not, "though, putting this thing and that thing together, nephew parson," he continued, "I no more doubt the fact than you do."

Felix paused; his conduct certainly appeared to show that he did not doubt it. His aunt Sarah had taught the children to call him Coz, and he had not forbidden it. While he was considering what answer to make, Sir Samuel repeated his former argument with himself.

"But, then, no human being acts without a motive, Felix."

"Certainly not."

"What motive can that woman have, nephew parson, in declaring that these children are none of mine?"

"I do not see that a *motive* is very far to seek," observed Felix, "if that is what you want."

"Nephew parson, that precise thing is what I do want."

"She is all-powerful while she receives whatever John allows the children, and spends it as she pleases."

"True — true."

"She has an excellent situation, and an almost independent one. I have a good opinion of her. I think it probable she does not know the children are anything to you. John may have chosen her through an agent; through an agent he may correspond with her. If you take them up, you make her place a sinecure, perhaps in the end dismiss her. How natural she should be hard to persuade that you have any right to them."

"But she knows that John is my son — and — and

the fact is, she undertook, before I had his address, to get a letter sent to him."

"She did!" exclaimed Felix.

Sir Samuel nodded. Mrs. Snaith, in the opinion of Felix, forthwith went down; he was rather sorry.

"Now, as you are good at motives," continued the old man, "find me a motive for John's behavior, nephew parson; there is that to think of also."

"Very true," said Felix, and he went on slowly. "John's motive, I should say, is transparent enough. It is evident that he has no claim, unless these are the children of a marriage."

Sir Samuel seemed to wince a little here.

"The only marriage I ever heard of that John wanted to make was one that you most violently opposed."

"I always shall oppose it," cried Sir Samuel, very red in the face. "I always will oppose it, to the last breath I can draw. Why — why, the fools had nothing to live upon — nothing at all."

"No," said Felix, rather coldly; "and yet it may have taken place, and these may be the offspring of it."

"A dissenting minister's daughter!"

"Yes. Well, all that supposed, one may suppose also that John thinks these children have a better chance of pleasing you, if he does not force them on your notice, than if he does; but it is quite a work of supererogation to make out motives either for him or the nurse. The wisest course, I should say, is to regard everything as absolutely uncertain till next mail day, when all will be set at rest."

"Extraordinary!" he thought, when the two had parted, and were going different ways. "So proud as old Sam is, that he should have demeaned himself to communicate with his own son, through the favor of a servant!

"*The fools had nothing to live on.* Of course not. He brought up John to no profession, and made him no regular and proper allowance; now he smarts for it, and perhaps for preventing that marriage as well. He might have maintained John married, for half what he

has cost him single. As far as I know, John never went wrong till the quarrel about that poor girl.

"I have never believed there was any instinctive drawing in the heart of a parent towards a stranger child. Is it possible that I see it here? He will have it so. He is determined to believe that these little creatures are his grandchildren.

"They are no trouble about the place, but I feel, and I suppose I shall feel, that their probably being something to him makes me no better inclined to regard them as something to me."

Felix spoke with a touch of bitterness. Sir Samuel had never so much as asked after Amias, the young nephew whose boyish escapade had deprived him of an excellent opening and future provision. Felix, being absolutely honest with himself, admitted mentally that, if the boy had settled to the brewery business, it would not have hurt his own conscience: people must have beer, just as they must have money; the abuse of either, or both, is their own affair. But now that the youth had broken away from his uncle, had given such reasons for the rash act, and was taking the consequences, on the whole, well and humbly, Felix would have denied himself every comfort in life rather than have interfered with his conscience.

"So you met Uncle Sam?" observed Amias that evening. "I am glad I did not."

"Why?"

"Because you say he was cordial, and that aggravates me. I don't like to think he is happy and jolly, *helping everybody to get drunk;* and I am not happy because —"

"Well?" said Felix, with a smile.

Amias paused.

"You, at least, may wish him well," said Felix; "he has never shown anything but kindness to you."

"But I hope it will stick in his conscience," observed Amias, "how all the judges talk against publicans and public-houses. Why, I was reading only this morning, that in some of the great towns, two-thirds of the pub-

lic-houses are brewers' property, and that they buy up the rubbishing old tenements and let them out at a low rent, on condition that all the stuff sold in them shall be of their own brewing. I hate the publicans."

"That's a fine Christian sentiment. Do you think there's no such thing as intemperance excepting in the case of strong drink; or can you really think that nobody is to blame for the drunkenness that degrades the country excepting the distillers, the brewers, and the publicans?"

"Why, what do *you* think, Felix?"

"I think they are no worse than other people, excepting when they make direct efforts to keep up the present state of things, after having had the misery of it pointed out to them. We are all to blame, we and our fathers."

"No worse? — the publicans no worse?"

"Unless they adulterate."

"But they do. We know they put aquafortis in. And do you call oils of juniper, and cocculus indicus, and photo-phosphate of iron proper things to drink? Did you never hear of these drugs? And are you not aware that at many public-houses you can hardly get such a thing as unadulterated beer, and that they put salt in it on purpose to make people thirsty?"

"Your voice is a little cracked at present, which makes me think you may be rather young just yet to lecture with good effect on this or any other subject."

"You are always so abominably calm, Felix. Well, anyhow, what I don't know yet about temperance, I shall find in my copy of 'The Publican's Mixing and Reducing Book.' I shall learn it all by heart, with its vile receipts for purifying tainted gin, etc. But you have no zeal; you are always making game of a fellow."

"On the contrary, your enthusiastic desire to do some good, and your ardent indignation against evil practices, are the qualities I like most in you. What I find ridiculous is that you are so positive."

"I certainly do wish that most of the breweries and distilleries had accidentally got blown up; and I wish

most of the public-houses were forcibly shut up — prohibited."

"But not all?"

"No, there must be some."

"How the 'some' would thrive! Many people, however, see great danger in legal restraints. That a thing should be dangerous and wrong, gives it often attraction enough; that it should also be forbidden, so far as is possible, might give it an extra charm."

"But that is not your view?"

"Perhaps not. Others reason thus. The French are a very sober people; every man of them may make his own wine, any man may sell it anywhere. What we should try for, rather than restriction, is freedom."

"I never thought of that."

"But you should think; and you should learn all that can be known on all points beforehand. And you must give up wholesale charges and exaggerations. There is also a certain thing that you would do well to settle forthwith, which is, whether it would give you most delight to reclaim two or three drunkards, or to make old Sam ridiculous in his own neighborhood, and to know that everybody blamed him, and talked of the feud between you."

"Two or three, Felix! You might at least allow a fellow two or three dozen. Am I to give up riches and independence, and perhaps a seat in parliament, for two or three?"

"You may be fairly said to have given these things up for nothing, for no principle whatever — merely for a ridiculous joke."

"Well, it was rather hard upon you, old man; I know that."

"And it seems to me that you live upon the hope that you shall one day justify that joke."

"So I do."

"I consider that a low motive — anything but heroic, anything but philanthropic."

"Well, I cannot be such a prig as to pretend that I think of nothing but philanthropy. 'There's a mixter,

sir, as Bolton said; 'you can't expect to find no tares at all in the best bag of seed-corn.' But perhaps you think the 'mixter' consists of a few grains of corn in a bag of tares?"

"I wish you to go away, not thinking of yourself as a martyr to principle, but simply as having made a joke and paid for it, and having now got to earn a living, if possible, in a manly, commonplace fashion. As for your zeal in the cause of temperance, I shall think something of it when you propose to begin to work for it in London, and nothing at all, so long as the joy of it depends on some great commotion made in our little town, just at our old uncle's gates. As I said to you just now, we are all — that is, all this nation which calls itself Christian — to blame for the present state of things; it is the selfishness of the whole community — the crowding up of the poor in foul air, where they crave stimulus, because they have not enough oxygen. It is the sordid way in which we have let them live, without any sort of culture, without ennobling amusements, without enough of anything — enough variety of food, enough light, enough warmth, enough joy, enough kindly fellowship with those that are better off, — it is our whole attitude toward them which has helped, not to make them a drunken people — for that they always were — but to keep them one. Our fathers drank deeply; we have, during the last three generations, been slowly struggling upward toward sobriety. We had every help; we only give them one help — the pledge. Do you think that if every drop of whiskey, gin, and ale could be sunk into the sea, and the trade in liquor be stopped, it would make people sober? No. It might, with every other aid that could possibly be thought of, put an end to half the drunkenness; but it is a natural instinct in man to long for stimulus when he is overworked, or weary, or sick, or sad, or when he has been used to have it; and the other half would all turn brewers and distillers on their own account. You cannot undo the evil work of many generations with a few rough and ready schemes; you must be patient and

painstaking, and you must not, above all, try to shove off the blame on other men's shoulders."

"All right, old man," said Amias, almost humbly.

He was to go away to London the next morning, at a very inconveniently early hour, by a third-class train, Felix having, after great efforts, at last got him into a Government office, at a salary on which it was hardly possible for him to be wholly maintained. He was to take with him rather a large hamper of potatoes and other roots, with a few green vegetables also, so as to eke out his first attempt at providing for himself in his lodgings. Felix was to send him fruit and vegetables now and then. This was by their aunt Sarah's advice, and was worth while, as she explained to the brothers, because the lodgings Amias was to occupy were close to the railway station. "You can give your landlady a vegetable marrow or two," she observed; "but, whether or not, you will probably, for reasons of her own, find her always willing to send for your hamper. The children might have gathered you more currants if Ann had superintended properly, but, if you'll believe me, I found her among the cabbages, telling them that those tiresome white butterflies were considered by the Greeks to be emblems of your soul, and hunting out with dictionaries the derivations of a slug."

CHAPTER XI.

SO Amias was gone. And Sir Samuel, when he quite by chance discovered this, felt somewhat aggrieved. It was manifest that he ought to have been told, and if the matter had been laid before him in a proper spirit, he should have given Amias something towards the needful expenses. He said so to his niece Sarah. "But I am not asked," he continued, with bitterness, "not consulted at all. Oh dear, no; that family is much too proud to take any help from me."

"Why doesn't he give it without being asked? Why doesn't he send Amias a check now?" thought the good lady. "He always reminds me of an onion (for we all, as it is said, resemble in some degree one or other of the inferior animals). His conscience is wrapped round with as many layers to cover it from the light, as the heart of an onion. The outside layer is avarice. Yes; very thick. Peel that off, you come to a layer of self-conceit; peel again, you come to his scruples — a sort of mock conscience. He must not do anything so wrong as to help Felix unless Amias first humbles himself."

It never occurred to Miss de Berenger for a moment that she ought to help her nephew Felix herself. And as he had been used to her all his life, and been accustomed to accept her at her own valuation of herself, it never occurred to him either. One duty was strongly impressed on her mind; this was the duty of paying her bills. She generally incurred debts, to the full amount of her income. Her course was plain; she must pay them.

But she frequently came and stayed with Felix, kept his house for the time, and paid her exact proportion of the expenses, besides almost always suggesting some plan by which he saved something or gained some advantage.

She was always welcome. He found her inconsequent speeches and simple shrewdness in action decidedly attractive and refreshing. Family affection is so far from following in the wake of esteem, that merely to be sure of it and depend on it, is often to have it. Those who are loved, not for any special qualities in themselves, but just because they are human beings, and stand near to us, are almost sure to retain affection; for they always will be human beings, and the longer they stand near to us the more at ease we shall feel with them. What so comfortable, what so delightful, as perfect ease? Nothing in the world can surpass it but perfect love, and that we cannot all expect.

When Felix, the very first time he entered his empty rectory house, found his aunt there before him, inspecting the cupboards and having one cleaned out, he did not interfere with her, did not even ask her a question; in a man's indolent way, he thought she knew what she was about.

"Yes," she presently observed, "you've got dozens of empty pickle bottles and empty marmalade pots over at your lodgings. I shall have those beer bottles saved too, and put in here till we want them."

Felix was surprised, but he let her alone, and she locked the closet and took away the key.

A good while after this she drove up in her pony-carriage, saying she had come to stay a week, and producing a great parcel of sugar, for which Felix was to pay. "Bolton will not buy the common gooseberries and cherries at all; they are so cheap this year." And she forthwith bustled into the garden and set everybody, excepting the rector, to work to gather fruit. "I shall have a quantity of jam made of the gooseberries," she observed to her nephew; "it will scarcely cost you threepence a pot. And the gooseberries could not be

bottled, because the beer bottles have such narrow necks; they would stick in them. I shall bottle the red currants. There are sixty bottles; I counted them. I shall save out one dozen for mulberry syrup." Thereupon she produced the big key of the cupboard, and before the week was over, there was a fine store of jam and excellent bottled fruit in the house.

Felix, of course, was glad; he knew enough about his own affairs to be sure that this would be a saving in his housekeeping, and also make his table more various. But he did not thank his aunt; he was just as well aware that it was a great joy to her to intermeddle in his matters, as she was that she might avail herself of the privilege, and yet count on his belief that all her intermeddling was for the best.

But to return to Sir Samuel and his important letter. The mails had now gone by, and there was no answer. He wrote again, and in case the first should have miscarried, he entered on all the particulars once more in a second letter.

Then it occurred to him that Mrs. Snaith might, in all good faith, have sent the first letter to Heidelberg, not being aware of his son's change of address. He wrote, and after complying with certain forms, got it back from the *poste-restante*. He hardly knew whether to be most annoyed or relieved — so much time lost. But, then, his son had not received a letter from him that he had neglected to answer.

It was now Christmas; he knew that he must wait till March, and felt that he must not make himself ridiculous meanwhile by having the two little girls to his house, or by in any other way seeming to acknowledge them before the time.

But he accepted and returned nods and smiles, even at the church doors; sometimes the parties exchanged kisses in less public places. The children liked to see his white head. Once Amabel climbed upon the seat of the pew at church, when the sermon was long, and looked over the high back, as if to ascertain whether he was in his place. Miss Thimbleby, who was in charge

of her and the other two children, quietly took her down, but the entire congregation saw the pretty smile with which she had greeted the old man, and his involuntary answer to it.

Felix wrote constantly to his brother, and gave him all manner of good counsel, which Amias was assisted to follow by his very straitened circumstances. He said as little as he possibly could in answer concerning this want of money, but the discipline of life was very strict upon him that winter and spring. He was poorer than any of the young fellows with whom he was associated. During the first week of his sojourn his story came out, and he passed for a kind of hero among them; though almost all thought him a fool for his pains, and would have thought him a prig too, but for the open and boyish sincerity with which he made his love of temperance depend on his anger against his old uncle. Many and many a temperance lecture was rehearsed in the presence of those choice spirits, his companions, without the faintest thought of influencing their habits in regard to strong drink, but simply to delight them by reproducing the ridiculous action and uncultivated language of certain zealots whom he now and then went to hear. He was a water-drinker, but escaped ridicule, because it was felt that this was not from high principle, but from indignation against his uncle for repudiating him. In the mean while it came in his way for no better reason than has been given — to accumulate a vast amount of information concerning the misery and crime arising from drunkenness, the almost incredible sums paid by the poor for the drinks that are their ruin, and the constant temptations set before them on all sides. These facts, when he had time to think them over, sometimes impressed him a good deal.

Early in April a letter from Felix let him know that old Sam was in great affliction; the news had just reached him that his son John had died of fever in Ceylon, and he could not hold up his head at all.

"Poor old boy!" thought the inconsequent youth. "Well, after all, malt liquor (if only it could be got

good and pure) is very wholesome; it's the public-houses that want doing away with." So he schooled his mind for a little while into less intemperate thoughts upon temperance.

John de Berenger, in fact, never read his father's important letter. The news of his death was communicated by a friend, a young man who was staying with him when his short illness came on, and who wrote of him very kindly, assuring his father that everything had been done for his comfort. Also, the letter was returned. The stranger apologized for having opened and read it, as a means of discovering to whom he should send the sad news. In consequence of the questions asked in it, he had collected every scrap of writing and every letter that he could find among John de Berenger's effects, and now forwarded them. He had not read them, but thought it right to tell Sir Samuel that, though the sick man had talked freely of his past life during the earlier stages of his illness, he had uttered no word that seemed to bear at all on such a matter as his father's letter unfolded.

Sir Samuel mourned for his son, and said to himself, "In a very short time I shall know all. The news of poor John's death will fall on that woman like a thunderbolt. Has she received it yet? Evidently not. I am left to tell it to whomsoever it may concern."

He searched the few letters that had been sent through and through; most of them contained pressing requests for payment of certain debts. There was not one that could possibly have come from Mrs. Snaith, or that seemed to concern the two little girls in any way whatever.

"But I have the whip-hand of her now," thought Sir Samuel. "She will see his death in the paper, even if the whole village is not eager to tell it to her beforehand. As he has left absolutely nothing behind him, no more supplies can reach her. She will be glad enough soon to come to me and tell the whole truth. I shall not make the first move."

Mrs. Snaith knew what ample time had passed since

the sending of her letter for an answer to reach Sir Samuel from any part of the world. He had not told her that he had received one — in fact, he had not spoken to her since she had taken the letter from his hand. She had often met him in the road, but had never accosted him. If he was quite satisfied now that he had made a ridiculous mistake, there was no need to make him own it, and thus, perhaps, bring on herself the dreaded question, "These children, not being my son's, why are they here? Whose are they?"

She always took refuge in silence, and tried to efface herself as much as possible from the thoughts of others. Sometimes she thought she would steal away from her cottage, and again take the children among strangers; but then careful reflection seemed to assure her that where she now was people had got used to her, and had ceased to wonder at her. There had seemed to be a mystery, but all the villagers considered that they had solved it, and all the same way; there was no difference of opinion. What talk there still was, chiefly concerned what old Sam would do, and why the family, who doubtless knew all, were so silent about it. Besides, the children were well, happy, receiving a very good education, and were already too familiar with these De Berengers ever to forget them. Moreover, if she fled, it would not only rouse curiosity to the utmost, but Miss de Berenger would be almost certain to start in pursuit, and in all probability would eventually find her.

The foolish have us far more in their power than the wise. If it had not been for Sarah de Berenger, Mrs. Snaith felt that she could have confided the whole truth to Felix, got him to keep it absolutely secret, and also help her to get away; but nothing could possibly be confided to Sarah, or it would come out; and if it was not confided, she would search for the children, meanwhile raising such a commotion, that the matter was sure to get into the newspapers as a strange and romantic story. Sarah would, perhaps, be silly enough to publish descriptions of the children, with their Chris-

tian names; these alone would be sufficient to rouse the suspicions of any person whatever among her old friends. Finally, some hint of it would reach the Dills, and, through them, the dreaded convict husband.

Sarah was away from her home when the news of John's death reached her. She came back and flew to Mrs. Snaith, asking where the darlings were.

"At the vicarage, ma'am, doing their lessons."

"And their mourning — is that ordered? Sir Samuel will, of course, expect to see them in proper mourning."

It was no use pretending to misunderstand, but Mrs. Snaith felt confident of her ground, and was determined to hold it. "No, ma'am," she answered. "You have no call to trouble yourself any further about that mistake. I take leave to tell you that Sir Samuel expect nothing of the kind."

That was on a Tuesday. Miss de Berenger considered that there would be plenty of time to get mourning ready by Sunday, and she wrote to Sir Samuel about it.

"The woman wants money already," he thought; "let her come and ask for it." And he wrote to his niece more curtly than kindly, desiring her not to interfere.

Mrs. Snaith did not apply for money, and at the end of the week Sir Samuel went to London, feeling that this was only a question of time.

In the mean while, knowing that whatever she did would make fresh talk, Mrs. Snaith dressed the children on Sunday in clean white frocks and white hats as usual, and sent them up to the vicarage, but had not courage to attend the morning service herself.

When the children came home to dinner, each had a black sash on. Cousin Sarah had sent them, they said, in answer to her questions, and Miss Thimbleby had put them on.

Mrs. Snaith shed a few quiet tears of vexation then. Sarah's folly had mastered her again.

To be in London a full year before he could hope for

a holiday. This was the lot of Amias, and what a long, slow, dark, and dirty year it seemed.

Occasionally, towards the end of it, he began to dream of the old church tower, and the rooks floating high above it in the clear elastic air, and to dream of scarlet strawberries ripening on their beds, and meadows full of buttercups, and hay being cut in the clear heat of noon, and of other common country sights and sounds which had never impressed him at all while he lived among them. Also of Felix and of that little monkey Dick. Like those of many another boy, his affections had slumbered a good deal since his childhood. They were waking. He found that he was rather attached to his elder brother; and when Dick sent him letters of wholly intolerable badness, as regarded both the writing and the orthography, he read them over with a certain keenness of pleasure, recalled the beautiful little brown face, imagined that he had always been very fond of Dick, and wondered whether the little fellow was grown.

April, May, and June went by. Sir Samuel, still in London, received no application from Mrs. Snaith, "but," he argued, "she may have been paid a quarter's allowance for the children just before my poor son's death."

He wrote to Felix, requesting him not to lend her any money.

"She may think," he considered, "that poor John has left money in the hands of his agent, and that through him she shall receive it. She cannot know as I do that he left nothing whatever behind him but his debts, and that I have his papers in my hands, which prove it fully. I wish I knew my dear boy's motive, though."

So he deluded himself. The human mind is always inexorable in demanding a motive for all human actions. It is only himself that each man permits to act without one, and avails himself of the privilege with astonishing frequency; sometimes letting a momentary caprice push itself in and snatch a reasonable motive out of his hand; sometimes, from mere indolence or in-

attention, failing to make out what he means to do till the thing does itself, and he, still hesitating, looks on and lets it alone.

Sir Samuel kept hesitating, and failing to make out what he wanted in this particular instance. The children were receiving an excellent education, were taken very great care of by their nurse, and — he was not asked for a shilling. He did not distinctly put this and that together, but waited on occasion and let things drift. When he thought of future expense, he hardly knew what he believed concerning these little girls; when he thought of his dear dead son, he did know. But his asking questions would not make them any more his grandchildren, if such they were, while it would, as he thought, bring him their bills to pay. No, it would be dangerous to investigate. He should *now* not encourage that woman to talk. He elected to leave things alone, and he had to take the consequences.

Thus the days and weeks went by, till that happy time arrived when Amias was to go home for his destined holiday.

A slow third-class train was alone within his means, and the nearest station being seven miles from his brother's house, he was not to be met, but to send his box on by a carrier, and walk over himself.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening of a very hot day when he stepped forth for his walk, first across a good many fields, then over the end of a great common, next through Sir Samuel de Berenger's wood, and finally along the winding country lane that went past his brother's gate.

He was still half a mile from it. The slow dusk had begun to gather; large flowers of the bindweed, trailing over the low wayside hedge, were mere specks of milky whiteness; he could but just distinguish between them and the dogroses, could hardly detect the honeysuckle but for its fragrance.

"Delightful!" he thought, as he strode on. "The smell of things in this lane is worth all the sights in London put together. Whew! what's that?"

He stopped. No cottage within a hundred yards, and yet a pungent, powerful whiff of something worse than London fog or smoke came past him, and lost itself among the honeysuckle. A smell of burning. He wondered — strode on — admitted to himself, almost with fear, that it was odd no one had come even thus far to meet him. Then, all on a sudden, behold, a great gap! Some slight thing fell with hardly a sound, and up mounted a shower of sparks. He ran on, shouting out in the dusk —

"Why — why, there's something wrong! What's up? What can be the matter? Mrs. Snaith's cottage is gone!"

Mrs. Snaith's cottage was gone indeed — its place was vacant; it was burnt to the ground. A few singed hollyhocks leaned forlornly forward to the road, two elms, with all their leaves shrivelled up, held out bare and ghastly arms, a puff of smoke came now and then from a dark heap of ashes, and a few sparks would mount when fanned by evening air.

Amias rushed on, dashed through a scattered group of people who seemed to be watching the rectory gates, and, encountering his aunt in the hall, demanded vehemently to be assured that Felix was all right.

"Yes, yes," quoth Sarah, "he's in his room, changing his singed clothes. You needn't bang at his door like a burglar," she panted, for she had pursued him upstairs.

"I knew he would be in the scrimmage," cried Amias, as Felix, opening his door a little way, let his brother in. "And where's Dick?" shouted Amias through the keyhole, having satisfied himself at once that his brother was none the worse. He opened the door about an inch to receive her answer.

"He never was near the fire," quoth Miss de Berenger. "As soon as I heard of it I ran into the garden, and there I found him, enjoying the prowl of innocence, his cat and his owl after him. He's safe in bed now, very sulky to think what fun there has been and he not in it."

"Anybody hurt?" asked Amias, as he was proceeding down a passage to look at Dick.

"Yes; Mrs. Snaith a little, foolish woman. And old Nanny Fothergill was frightened almost into a fit, seeing the flames through her window."

"Oh, she's alive yet?"

"Yes," quoth Miss de Berenger. "She's not at all an irreligious woman, though she *has* lived to be ninety-four. I don't know how she reconciles that with 'the days of our life,' you know, 'are threescore years and ten.' At the same time," she continued, falling into thought, "I am quite clear that it would not be right of her to hasten matters."

CHAPTER XII.

THE return of Amias had, indeed, followed closely on the conclusion of an exciting occurrence.

It was Thursday evening; Felix always had full service then, and a sermon.

This was the favorite religious occasion of the week, and (except during the harvest) very well attended. A time-honored institution; the ringers ushered it in with a cheerful peal. Then, when days were long, the outlying hamlets, and not unfrequently the adjacent parishes, contributed their worshippers; and even some people from the little town (former parishioners of Felix) would walk over to join, and see how he fared. Then every old woman, as she came clattering up the brick aisle, felt some harmless pride in herself; she knew she must be welcome, helping to swell the congregation. She looked at Felix, as he stood gravely waiting in the desk, and he looked at her.

Then were given out long-winded hymns, dear to all the people. Then the rustic choir broke out into manifold quavers, and sang with a will. Then shrill, sweet voices of children answered, and farmers' wives put in like quavers (but more genteelly), while the farmers themselves, and the farmers' men, did their share with a gruff heartiness, not untuneful. Then, also, the "Methody folk," having no "Bethel" of their own, came to church, and expressed their assent to the more penitential prayers by an audible sigh and an occasional groan. They said of Felix that he was a gracious young man, and knew how to hit hard; which two qualities they considered to be strictly harmonious.

But his own people gave him a good word as well. He had inherited this service from his predecessor, and finding it at a convenient hour and popular, kept it up with loyal and dutiful care. They said of him that "he had no pride; *he* didn't mind shouting for a poor man. Preached just as loud and just as long, he did, in bad weather, when he had nobbut a few old creeturs and poor Simon Graves the cripple for congregation, as when the most chiefest draper and his lady walked over from the town to attend, as well as Mr. Pritchard the retired druggist, that kept his own gig, and was said to be worth some thousands of pounds."

It is hardly needful to record that Felix did not find the singing ridiculous. It was far from perfect praise, but he supposed it must be more acceptable than city music led by an organ, and sung by a paid choir.

There is something very pathetic in the worship of the poor and rustic. They often think they oblige the clergyman by coming to church. And the old have a touching humbleness about them; they feel a sincere sense of how worthless they are in this world, which they could hardly have attained unless the young had helped them to it. The rich mix the world with their prayers, so do the poor; thus — they feel that they come and say them with their betters.

So this was a Thursday evening. Felix felt the solemn sweetness of the hour. It was a clear, hot time of year, and all the doors and windows were open. He had an unusually large congregation, and had just mounted into the pulpit and given out his text, when, to the astonishment of the people, instead of beginning to preach, he stood bolt upright for an instant; then his eyes, as it seemed involuntarily, fell on Mrs. Snaith (who sat just facing him), with a look of such significance, that she instantly started up and rushed out at the chancel door.

She thought of the little girls, naturally; what had she in life but them?

The amazed congregation gaped at him. He turned to the schoolmistress, and saying, "Keep all those chil-

dren in their places," closed his Bible and exclaimed to the people generally, "My friends, remember that there are fire-buckets under the tower, and that the nearest water is in my pond. Mrs. Snaith's cottage is on fire."

The red light from it was already flaring high, and making pink the whitewashed walls and his gown. It had passed for a sunset flush, till from his height he saw what it meant; and saw the two little girls running hand in hand down the dusty lane, with loose hair flying. They were making their way, clad only in their white night-gowns, towards the church, for there they doubtless knew that Mamsey was.

Thanks to the way in which he had arranged his sentence, the mass of the people, as they rushed out of church, ran round to the tower, and when he himself descended, he met the two little girls, neither hurt nor frightened, running up to the door. Each had a great doll — her best doll — under one arm; but when they saw him, with childish modesty they sat down on a grassy grave, and tucked their little feet into their gowns. It was such a very hot night that there was no risk of their taking harm from their evening excursion. Not that any one thought of that, or thought much about them, excepting Felix, who, fearing that Mrs. Snaith might not have seen them, and might risk her life for their sake, followed on after her at the top of his speed, leaving them behind with his aunt Sarah.

"Yes!" exclaimed Sarah, when describing the scene afterwards to Amias. "There are occasions when decorum and dignity are forgotten. If you had seen what Felix looked like, rushing down the lane with his surplice flying! An exaggerated owl suggested itself, or a ghost pursued by its creditors. These are the things that give Dissenters such a hold when they cry out for Disestablishment. However, by the time he overtook the clerk, he had got it off; he flung it over the old man's arm, who folded it up, and laid it on the grass under a fir-tree."

Felix on this occasion found little scope for the exercise of courage, and no opportunity of giving aid. The

dry thatch was sending out an even breadth of flame to the very middle of the road; there was (as he supposed) no approaching. There was great shouting; men as well as women were eagerly handing on fire-buckets, while he searched the crowd for Mrs. Snaith, and was told, to his amazement, that she was inside the blazing premises. He had scarcely heard it when she emerged from them, with a box under her arm. He and Mr. Bolton advanced to help her forward. Her gown was smoking, and some buckets of water were thrown all over them without ceremony, as their bearers, running up with them from the pond, saw the state of the case. Mr. Bolton, dripping as he was, could not forbear to moralize. "Now, didn't I tell you, ma'am, 'twas too late? Your things were all alight. This is one of the occasions when folks may be glad their goods ain't worth much, 'stead of risking their precious lives to save them. Sit down, there's a good creature," he continued, as he and Felix conducted her to a grassy bank.

Mrs. Snaith put a small box into the hands of Felix, then sat down and wiped her face.

"Your gown's no better than tinder," continued Mr. Bolton, taking a mean advantage of her inability to answer. "Choked a'most, I can see. And you've got me a good suit of clothes spoilt very near, and the water, that's black as ink, running over me and Mr. de Berenger, and right into our shoes, just because you must needs save your Sunday bonnet. There's nothing better in that box, I'll be bound. And I did tell you your Windsor chairs were safe outside, before even we got out of church, and your eight-day clock, and your best fender and fire-irons." Here he gave himself a shake, and a pool of water enlarged itself at his feet.

"Let her alone," said Felix, compassionately. "She thought the children were inside."

"No, sir," said Mrs. Snaith, recovering her voice, "I didn't."

Having thus dissipated his sympathy, she got back her box from him, and he also felt for the first time how wet he was. He, too, felt inclined to moralize.

A good many buckets of water had by this time been flung at the fire, but it seemed to send all out in steam again, and before ever a straw of the thatch was wet, and just as the sunset flush faded, all that had once been a habitation had gone up or gone down. It was not. A thick black cloud of pungent smoke brooded still among the trees, and a soft wet heap of ashes was lying in the garden. The shouting and excitement were over. It had been a very old cottage, and built of wood and plaster; dry weather had made the thatch ready for a spark which had come from the chimney. Well, it had been a strange thing to see how fast it had melted down, or with what a rage of haste the flame and smoke of it had ascended; but, after all, the people considered it had not been what any one could call a tragical sight: nobody was injured, and there was hardly any property in it worth mentioning.

Felix was a little hoarse the next morning, after his wetting, when Mrs. Snaith knocked at his study door, and asked if she might speak with him.

She and her children had slept at the rectory; her eight-day clock had been accommodated in the kitchen, and was diligently ticking and striking against the clock of the house. Her Windsor chairs, also her fender and fire-irons, some bedding, and a few toys, were disposed about a large empty room. No need to apologize for their presence in it; they made it look more habitable.

These things had been saved by the first man who discovered the fire, and who had carried the two little girls downstairs before he gave the alarm.

Mrs. Snaith, over and above a sort of contrition for the trouble her goods had caused in their burning — or saving, as the case might be — was much vexed at the drenching Mr. de Berenger had got, and the cold it had evidently given him.

Felix had fortunately been only arrayed at the time in a rusty old camlet cassock; it was still in course of being slowly dried at the kitchen fire. Joliffe said it could take no damage; it was past that. This was a secret source of comfort to Mrs. Snaith. But she

longed to explain matters, and she wanted to know what had been done with her box. As Felix opened the door to let her enter, she felt a certain hint of disapproval in his voice, hoarse though it was.

"If you please, sir," she began, "might I see if the things in my box are safe?"

"Oh, your box," he answered, looking about him. "What did I do with it? There it is — just inside the fender. You risked a great deal for that box, Mrs. Snaith."

He was sitting now at his writing-table, and, pointing with his pen at the scorched and smoky article, was surprised to see the eagerness with which she darted upon it, as she replied, "Well, yes, sir; but what else could I do? If I'd lost that, I should never have forgave myself. I didn't ought to have kept it in the copper, but I thought it was a safe place, too."

She set it on the table before him.

"This is a sort of thing that people call a bandbox, is it not?" he inquired. "You surely kept nothing valuable in it?"

"Yes, sir, I did. I thought, in case of thieves, they would never think of looking in a bandbox for what I'd got. It's full of papers and things, sir. All I have for maintaining the children, and schooling them, and that."

Felix was struck with astonishment when she opened it, and began to lay its contents before him.

"Why, this is property," he exclaimed, taking up a paper. "This is a United States bond, payable to bearer. If this had been burnt, the money it brings in would have been lost, forfeited, and, as far as I know, irreclaimable."

"Yes, I know, sir. I was fully warned."

"By whom?"

Mrs. Snaith was not to be caught; she made an evident pause here, choosing her words.

"By him that gave them over to me, sir. He advised me to turn them into another kind of property so soon as I could. But I never could exactly make out how. And I was afraid it might be found out."

She stopped and colored, as if vexed with herself, when she had said these last words. He made as if he had not heard them; and she had such trust in him, and in his gentle manhood, that observing this, she felt safe again, as if she had not made that little slip of the tongue.

"Where is the list? You have a list of the papers, of course," continued Felix; and he had scarcely any doubt that he should be shown his cousin John de Berenger's handwriting.

"I have no list, sir."

Felix, full of surprise, paused again. He had set a chair for her opposite to himself, and as she took out paper after paper, and handed them to him across the narrow table, he received each and scanned it with curiosity and interest.

"Would you like me to make a list for you?" he said at last.

"I should be much obliged to you, sir. Most of them have numbers — I've noticed that; and I have some of the numbers in my memory."

"Do I understand that no list, even of the numbers, was given you?"

"No, sir," she replied, as if apologizing for the donor. "It were rather a hasty thing, and a legal document cost money."

"A legal document! Well, Mrs. Snaith," — here he paused; he would not mention a name, she having so carefully and pointedly refrained from doing so — "Well, Mrs. Snaith, *he* showed great confidence in you that gave these papers over to your charge."

"He hadn't any choice, sir," she put in, but rather faintly. ("I'll be bound he hadn't!" thought Felix.) And she continued her sentence, "And it was no more than my due to have them."

"Still, as I said, it was a great mark of confidence," continued Felix, "and far be it from me to show less. But I may say, and I do, that it was a strange act of imprudence in you to keep this property by you in such a form, specially though (as you admit) you were ex-

pressly warned not to do so. Since you lived here you have, as I remember, taken a journey several times. Did you carry this box with you?"

"Yes, sir; I went to get what they call the dividends paid. I fared to think I ought not to trouble *you* about this, but now you have come to know —"

"Well, Mrs. Snaith?"

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind the trouble of letting me understand how to turn them into something safer — invest them over again. You see, sir, if I were to die, it would be very awkward."

"Very, indeed," said Felix, gravely; "because, for anything that appears to the contrary, this property is absolutely yours; so that, if you died, not a shilling of it could be claimed for the children. I say," he continued, seeing her look amazed, "that the two children, being no relation to you, could not in case of your death, claim to possess what is only payable to Hannah Snaith. Your own relations might claim it, you see, and the children would actually be cut out."

Mrs. Snaith, on hearing this, turned extremely pale. She saw that she herself was, in case she died, so acting as to cut her children out of the money which she only cared to have for their sake. What had she not sacrificed already for them? How should she learn to do anything more?

"But surely there is a will," continued Felix, the strangeness of John's supposed conduct growing on him. "No doubt, though you may not be aware of it, some other person, some other guardian, must have been appointed to meet such a case."

Mrs. Snaith, still very pale, was silent. If she had only said so much as "I do not know," he would have been better satisfied.

"I take for granted that the person, whoever he was, that made over this property to you, did so in full confidence that it would be faithfully spent on and for these children."

To this appeal she still made no reply. She had for some time seen no cause to fear that her wretched hus-

band would ever find her; she had left behind her, at present divided among her own relations, so much of the income as she felt it her duty to let him take, and she meant the children to inherit the remainder. "I may die any day," was the thought now pressing on her, "and so sure as I die, they would advertise for my relations, let them have it, and, unless they found out the truth, which would be still worse, my dears would be left penniless."

"Sir," she said at last, "if it please the Lord, I hope I shall live to see my — dear — young ladies grow up."

The slight, the undefinable air of disapproval, daunted her. She was so much puzzled, so much agitated by the perception of how nearly she had lost everything, and by his remark as to the children not being related to her, that she had no intelligence at liberty for noticing that disapproval was an odd sensation for a man to exhibit concerning a matter that was no affair of his. Still less did she think of Sir Samuel's former notion, as perhaps shared by Felix. She never doubted that the old man had received a letter from his son, which had set the matter at rest. She often thought he had gone away because he was proudly angry that he ever should have been so deceived, and should have demeaned himself to come and question her.

There was Sarah, to be sure — the children were still allowed to call her Coz — but Sarah was so inconsequent, so wrong-headed, that she and her doings hardly seemed to count.

"I have been very foolish, I own, sir," she said at last, in a tone of apology, for, as has just been explained, the reason of his disapproval was hidden from her. "What do you think it would be best for me to do now?"

"I am not a very good man of business," Felix answered, "but I think this property could not be invested in the names of the two children — only by guardians or trustees, for their benefit." Then he paused to think. "I am the more likely to be right in this notion, because

it has not been done already; but I can easily ascertain. If you consent to its being invested for them," he continued, "I will agree to be one of the guardians, you being the other."

Amazing kindness! remarkable condescension! Mrs. Snaith could not hear it and keep her seat. She rose and courtesied. "Sir, you are very kind; I am deeply obliged to you," she answered, very highly flattered, and also very much flustered. "I never could have hoped for such goodness; but it's just like you, sir."

Why was it "like" in Mrs. Snaith's opinion? Because Felix stood godfather to half the children baptized in his parish; because he let himself be called, at all untimely hours, to comfort the sick; because he had housed her goods, and helped to carry them in as a matter of course; because she had more than once seen him carry the market basket of a poor rheumatic old woman, and lend her the aid of his arm as well to help her home — these were some of the reasons why it was "like him" to propose being guardian to her little treasures.

Felix looked up when, again seating herself, she pushed the papers toward him, as if giving them over to his charge for good and all.

The shadow of a smile crossed his face. He did not see that it was so very kind; but the tinge of disapproval vanished.

"You consent, then?"

"Yes, sir, I consent, and thank you kindly; but I am that circumstanced, as I can only say I consent unless *he* should interfere that may be able to interfere."

"Now, what does she mean by that?" thought Felix, still strong in the notion that he was to be guardian to John de Berenger's children. "Can she mean old Sam? I suppose she does."

But though his face was full of cogitation, the sunshine of approval had come back to it — he was even feeling that he had wronged her; and when she said would he lock the papers up in some safe place, and do as he pleased about investments, he felt suddenly that he did not want such perfect liberty as that. "I shall

do nothing without consulting a lawyer," he said, "and you will be so good as to take care of the list I have made."

"Hadn't you better keep it, sir?" she answered, in her simplicity; "it would save you the trouble of making another."

"No, Mrs. Snaith," he answered, and laughed and held out his hand, as he generally did to his parishioners. So she shook hands with him and left the room, feeling as if she should like to serve him all her days.

When she had retired, Felix again looked over the papers. "All made payable to bearer — that bearer, Hannah Snaith." Now, if John de Berenger had made that money over to her during his lifetime, it must have been to protect it, so that it could not be recognized as his, and claimed by his creditors. He must have trusted her; and she had proved worthy of his trust as regarded her honesty. As regarded her prudence — no!

Felix leaned his chin on one hand, and turning over those papers with the other, began to puzzle himself with a problem which he stated wrongly, and which, consequently, could have no right answer.

The problem was this.

"As John de Berenger had died deeply in debt, could this money (invested in the name of Hannah Snaith) be considered in fairness to belong to *his* children; was it not the property of his creditors? Had he not proved, by the course he had taken, in order to conceal or protect it from them, that it was in justice theirs?

"That depends," Felix presently thought, "on how John got the money. Wait a minute. This woman, Hannah Snaith, has repeatedly declared that she knew nothing about John. After all, why may not this be true? Why may not the money have come through his wife, whoever she was?

"No, that won't do. 'By *him* that made them over to me,' she said. Well, why should it not have been the wife's father?

"Let me think this out. If John did marry, as I suppose is certain (at least, one of the few things Han-

nah Snaith has positively declared, is that these children were born in wedlock, and that she could easily prove it if necessary) — as he did marry, I will therefore say he must be supposed to have married that poor, pretty young creature, the Baptist minister's daughter, whom he harped upon to me for years, fell in love with when she was only fifteen, as he saw her passing to and from school — Fanny Tindale (neither child is called Fanny, by-the-by). Well, let us say that after her father moved away to somewhere in Lincolnshire, I think it was, John went and married Fanny Tindale. I know she died some time ago. Suppose her father, a vulgar old fellow, but not particularly poor, that I am aware of, saved, or at any rate died possessed of, what I now see before me — I am sure I have heard that he too is dead — of course his care would be to prevent John from ever touching his money; but if he died before his daughter, he may have feared lest somehow it might be got hold of by the creditors, and may have chosen to trust it to a person whom he knew, and no relation, in the faith of her honesty. Her being more of his class in life than of John's, is much in favor of the theory. And this is in favor of it too, that by all I know of her — and I know her now pretty well — I seem to be assured that she is not a person who would lend herself to any scheme that she knew to be dishonest."

Felix de Berenger, having thus stated his problem, thought the better of himself for finding an answer to it so convincing and so complete.

"I wonder I never thought of this before," he observed, as with a satisfied air he locked up Hannah Snaith's papers. "Poor little waifs! Yes, I see it all."

An uncomfortable reflection sometimes presses on us, to the effect that the world is full of people who think they have an answer to most of the problems of life, or at least to such as more especially concern their own lives. Who think so — but we are sure they are mistaken. And is it not possible — just possible — though to the last degree improbable, that we, we ourselves, may be? No, that flash of intelligence crossing the shady

chambers of thought, is soon put out; of such reflections the human mind is always impatient.

Yet a great many of us know no more of the answers to such problems as lie close about us, and most concern us, than did the Reverend Felix de Berenger in this recorded instance, and nevertheless we, perhaps, as he did, bring a great deal of good out of the mistaken circumstances.

CHAPTER XIII.

HANNAH SNAITH'S money was soon reinvested, and she herself made joint guardian with Felix to Amabel and Delia de Berenger.

But even before that was accomplished she found herself in a different, in a lower, position. In fact, this was the case from the day she gave it up — almost from the hour; for she was staying at the rectory house, and made welcome to remain as long as she liked. She, therefore, began at once to help Jolliffe with all the household duties, which were greater than usual by the presence of Amias, her two little girls, and last, but not least, of Miss de Berenger, with her maid.

Sarah had been invited to come and help to welcome "Ames," as she always called him. She perceived and mastered the facts of this new situation at once. Mrs. Snaith's cottage was down. There was no cottage empty in the village; there were no lodgings to be had near enough to admit of the children's daily attendance at the rectory to take their lessons. If she let them and their nurse depart, her scheme would all tumble into ruins. Felix would lose a certain small amount of profit that he derived from it, there would be no one to educate Dick, nothing to keep his "grandchildren" in the view or the mind of Sir Samuel, and an interesting mystery, which she herself had brought into notice, might be withdrawn.

She walked about the garden nodding at her own thoughts, and saying, "Yes," many times. She was excited, but, after a while, her movements became calmer. She resolved on action. "Dear Felix! Yes; how stupid men are! Better off, he says, than he could

have expected — finds his income go further. Why, how should it be otherwise? He receives money, and pays in kind. It's true Bolton pays at less than market price, but Felix has the land for nothing, and does the labor himself, too; so he pays for little but for seed. The same with Ann Thimbleby. She educates Dick, and takes 'green meat' for her young sister instead of much of the coin she would, but for it, get for herself — Yes, I'll do it now." Accordingly, with what for her was almost a languid air, she went indoors, and, in the course of conversation, asked Felix what was the exact income produced by the shares, &c., which had been made over to him.

Felix told her.

That he was to be joint guardian with her to these children had been gratefully mentioned by Mrs. Snaith herself, and was not a secret. Sarah revolved the sum in her mind as she slowly proceeded down the long passages of the house to an almost empty room, where Mrs. Snaith was sitting at work. To do her justice, she considered that, whatever she proposed, must certainly include a maintenance for the nurse, who, though she had been so very imprudent as very nearly to lose the children's money, had still meant so well by them that she had a full right to remain their attendant.

It certainly did occur to her, however, that this was a disadvantage. "She will be a very expensive servant," was her thought, "and difficult to manage, perhaps, for she has been long independent. But for her undeniable claims, I could make Felix — yes! get a much less expensive person."

Mrs. Snaith was counting over and mending some clothes of her own and of the children's, which had fortunately been at the wash when her cottage was burnt. This gave Sarah a natural opening for what she wanted to say. She sat down, took up a little frock, and admired it.

"Yes! Mrs. Snaith, how nice the little girls always look — so neatly and prettily dressed. I like your taste. Do you mind telling me what their clothes cost?"

"About thirteen pounds a year each, ma'am. I'm glad you like the looks of them."

"And you give twenty for their schooling?"

"Yes; and the rent was six pounds yearly. I reckoned that very cheap."

"I almost wonder how you managed."

"Oh, ma'am, very well indeed. I can get them to eat but little meat at present, bless them; so I took care they had plenty of milk and eggs, and those are cheap here."

"Then there is your own dress; you always look the picture of neatness."

This interest rather flattered the nurse. "Well, ma'am, I got the whole of the eatables paid for, and sometimes a little beer, out of the rest of the income, and I had about twenty pounds left for myself, as I may call it."

Sarah was silent; she was cogitating.

Mrs. Snaith went on with her confidences. "The washing were the expense I could not stand, so I took it home, and almost always did it; but the last fortnight, thank goodness, I had put it out, because Jolliffe, being unwell, I wished to come and help her up at the rectory. But for that I should have lost all our clothes."

"Every word she says makes the matter easier," thought Sarah. "Yes. Twenty-six pounds for the children's dress, twenty pounds for what I'll call her wages, twenty for the schooling, sixty-six. Set aside four for doctors or a visit to the sea — that would leave eighty. Felix could do it — just do it. Thirty for her board, twenty-five for each child. In fact, it would be a profit to him (mem. not to tell him so). Yes; because I shall soon get the *girl* dismissed. Of course Mrs. Snaith could attend to the children, Dick included — do needlework; I know her. She would never sit with her hands before her. She and Jolliffe would do everything; and instead of the wages and board of that girl, who eats more than anybody in the house, Felix might have that active little washerwoman to come every Saturday as a charwoman and do what

scrubbing or cleaning there could be that they objected to. She brings home the clothes on Friday. Yes. Why, Felix would be a great gainer by it. Is there a chance, now, that it might be done? Two such capable women in the house — if only they were not jealous of one another! He would save nearly forty pounds a year by that girl's food and wages and breakages; and he'll never know how that's managed, unless I tell him. Such are men!"

She got up rather abruptly, putting down the pretty little frock with a thoughtful air, and walking away in deep cogitation, her bright red cheeks requiring to be cooled by frequent throwing back of the long curls.

Felix was just setting off to hold a service in an outlying part of the parish, where a schoolroom had been licensed for the purpose. Amias was with him. Sarah walked a little way beside them, the better to unfold her plan, in which she did not mention the eventual dismissal of the young servant then in the house, but only explained to Felix that he would lose nothing, and be a gainer, by the excellent services of Mrs. Snaith.

"What, come and live here as a servant," exclaimed Felix, "and accept twenty pounds a year! I am sure she would never think of such a thing. Why should she, aunt?"

"Why, she gets nothing but board and lodging and twenty pounds a year now," said Sarah.

"And independence," observed Felix, his aunt's words impressing him so little that he went on talking to his brother as if she had not interrupted him.

Sarah waited for a pause, and then she too went on as if she had not been interrupted. "But that was a very nasty little cottage that she lived in — always smelt of the dry rot. Only think how different it would be to live in a nice rectory house like yours! You might let her have that empty room on the ground floor as a kind of sitting-room for herself; it opens into the kitchen. And there are large rooms upstairs that you make no use of."

"You'd better dismiss it from your mind, aunt," said Felix.

"It's no use talking to the old man when he's going to one of his services," said Amias.

Felix strode on; Sarah trotted beside him. Amias, meandering now before, now behind, jerked up a stone into the clear air, and his aunt thought it came down rather dangerously near to his feet.

"Oh yes, dismiss it, of course, Felix! And you, Amias, bring yourself to an untimely end, if you like, before my eyes! Pray don't mind *me*. Why, how is Ann Thimbleby to be paid, unless these children are here to be taught? and what house is there here now, but yours? *Yes, you won't get a congregation for your saints' days service, I can tell you, if you send away Ann Thimbleby and Mrs. Snaith, your best attendants!*"

Miss de Berenger knew that this last remark would tell. It did. Felix, for a moment, stood stock still.

"You'll have to shut up the church pretty often," she continued, "because you know it's not lawful to have a service without a congregation."

"Well?" said Felix, dreamily.

"And you don't like that."

"No."

"What can you be thinking of, Felix? You do not seem to consider the importance of my words."

"Why, he's thinking," observed Amias, "that Mrs. Snaith cannot be expected to accept twenty pounds a year, and become a servant, in order that he may have a congregation on saints' days."

Here, coming near a stile, by which they had to enter the field they were to cross, Amias measured its height with his eye, took a short run, and sprang over it. "This time last year," he said to Felix, "you shirked that stile." Felix looked at him steadily, then he also took a short run, and cleared it easily.

"Before my very eyes!" exclaimed Sarah, "Oh, youth, youth! how thoughtless! Yes."

"You'd better dismiss it from your mind, aunt," repeated Felix, turning and regarding her from the other side of the stile. "I cannot think about it till after to-morrow. Perhaps something will turn up."

Then the brothers proceeded on their way together, and Sarah, who was arrayed in a salmon-colored gown, returned slowly to the house.

"The fact is, a different generation is never to be depended on to understand one," thought Sarah. "I'm sure Felix seems earnest and serious enough as a rule, and then all on a sudden, when you think you've got him, he shows the cloven foot of youth. The experience and wisdom that comes with years, oppresses young people. To-morrow's Sunday. Let me see."

Sarah proceeded slowly to the house, and entered it by the back way.

Jolliffe, in the clean kitchen, was cutting thick bread and butter.

"How are you to-day, my good creature?"

"Better, ma'am, thank you kindly. Mrs. Snaith has been doing for me right and left."

"Ah, what a comfort she is in the house!"

"You may say that, ma'am; whereas with a girl you never know where you are. They make more work than they do, and they eat their heads off. I never looked to have to spend my precious strength cutting bread and butter for a servant-girl, but for all that I know better than to let her cut it for herself."

"Yes," said Miss de Berenger, who was very friendly with Jolliffe. "I wish there was a chance of your having Mrs. Snaith here always."

"Oh, ma'am," answered Jolliffe, "no such luck."

So her sentiments were ascertained. Miss de Berenger went again into the room where the nurse was sitting. Her own clock, her chairs and table, her best fender, and two or three other articles that had been saved, were arranged in it. Mrs. Snaith was darning socks now, and Sarah observed some of Dick's among them.

"How comfortable you look, Mrs. Snaith, with all your things about you — quite at home."

"Yes, indeed, ma'am. It were a kindness I never can repay Mr. de Berenger, taking me in till I can look round; it relieve me from so much discomfort."

"I should not at all mind seeing you always here," observed Sarah. "Nor would my nephew; but he seems to think you would not like the notion — in fact, he said I had better dismiss it from my mind. And yet, as I said to him, I cannot see where else you can possibly be; for it is not to be thought that, now my nephew has undertaken to be a guardian to the children, he would consent to them being taken quite away."

"Ma'am!" exclaimed the nurse, coloring deeply and putting down her work. She looked like a creature which has suddenly found out that it is tethered. The grass close around had proved so abundant and so sweet, that it had not hitherto stepped out far enough to feel the tugging of the string.

She took up the sock again and tried to go on with her work, but her hand trembled. There were going to be discussions; they would argue with her, and question her, even if they did not interfere.

Sarah, observing her discomfort, thought what a nervous woman she was. She had not seriously supposed, when she made that last speech, that Mrs. Snaith would consent to her whole plan; her uttermost hope was that, if higher wages were offered, she might agree to remain for a time, and then, by some further plan for her advantage, be induced to stay on.

Sarah had such a just confidence in her own powers of scheming, that she depended on herself to bring a further plan to light when it should be wanted, and her general way of proceeding was to state the matter at its worst, and then, if the conflicting party rejected it, to yield to objections and show advantages.

"Yes," she continued, "I had been wondering what you would do." Then she unfolded the plan she had concocted, adding, "Of course, if you lived here, you would not be called a servant; and, as you have told me, you only get board and lodging and about twenty pounds a year as it is. However, my nephew remarked that I had better dismiss it from my mind."

Sarah made and propounded many schemes, and had long ago learned to be philosophical as to the utter re-

jection of some of the best and most impartial, as well as to receive without obvious elation the adoption of some of those most to her own advantage. She propounded, and then observed.

Mrs. Snaith, as usual, took refuge in silence, so Sarah presently perceived that there was some hope of her consent. She therefore went on.

"This room is very like a nursery. It could be yours if you came. I never liked the miserable little attic — no air in it — where the darlings slept in that cottage. They could have a room five times as large here, and three times as high. So, of course, *they* would be better off here; there is no doubt it would be for *their* advantage to remain. Yes? Well, of course, if that is so, and as you are fond of them, you would, I conclude, wish them to stay; and then you would stay too? You would not like to leave them; you are too fond of them for that? Still, as my nephew said, something might turn up."

Mrs. Snaith was not startled by this hint of a possibility that she might leave the children for their own good, for so the questioning tone made her read the meaning of these words. She noticed that Sarah still stuck to the notion that the children were her relations, but her mind was too much on the stretch now for such a feeling as surprise. Was there not a course open to her which would provoke no discussion at all, admit of no opposition, lead to no questioning? Yes, there was; and yet was it not such a manifestly disadvantageous course for her, that, if she fell into it at once, Jolliffe and all her acquaintances of her own class would wonder at her?

She looked about her, and felt the truth of what had been said; the accommodation was much better — so much more air and space. She was shrewd enough to notice that it was Miss de Berenger, and not the rector, that had thought of this plan. She observed, with the quickness of one used to money matters in a small way, that though the children would live better than they had done, and only the same sum be spent on their

board by her, yet, as ar abundance of milk, eggs, and vegetables came from the rectorial cow, poultry-yard, and garden, the rector would be a considerable gainer. He had the land required for this produce free of rent. Now, what was she asked to give up besides her independence? Her heart fluttered, her color changed, her hand trembled, as she thought this over. She was willing to efface herself utterly, if need were, but not to dare discussion.

"Ma'am," she said at last, "such a — such a kind offer as this require some time to think over."

"Oh, certainly," answered Sarah, greatly surprised, and inclined, by the expression "kind," to believe that the proposition really might be as good a one for Mrs. Snaith as for Felix — or, at any rate, that she thought so.

"I can stay, and no questions asked," thought the other. "And if I had to leave them — if poor Uzziah came out, and there was any fear of his finding me — where could I leave them so safe as they are here, leave the money behind for them as well? Yes, my precious dears, mother 'll do this for you too."

In the rectory house that night, housed in a large, comfortable room, Mrs. Snaith lay awake all night considering matters. It was bitter to give up her independence, but there was safety in it. First, because no one belonging to her would believe that she would give it up, and look for her in domestic service. Secondly, because it would mark and make wider the apparent difference of station between her and the children. They would be in the parlor, and she in the kitchen. What between these cogitations and the effects of her late alarm and excitement, which, after an interval of slumber, were roused again by this second cogitation, she was very restless and nervous all Sunday, and laid herself down again at night, dreading inexpressibly what she had to do, and yet, as the weary, wakeful hours bore on, deciding more fully that it should be done, and that she would do it.

Felix was rather an intellectual man, but by no

means intelligent; that is, he could think better than he could observe. He liked to cogitate over principles, and he disliked details. His own habits were most simple, self-denying, and economical; but he had no notion how to cut down household expenses, and in all domestic matters he was quite at the mercy of the womankind about him.

Hannah Snaith, while she perceived that Miss de Berenger had made a scheme which was very much to her nephew's advantage, was quite sure he did not know it, and naturally would not be enlightened by his aunt. Everybody understood Miss de Berenger better than Felix did. Jolliffe and Mr. Bolton had confidently declared that Miss Sarah would go home on Tuesday. Mrs. Snaith was also sure she would. Why? For this reason. Miss de Berenger had driven herself over on the previous Wednesday in her pony-carriage, and had not brought a bag of oats in the back of the vehicle for the creature's food, as usual; there was nothing found there but a longish cord for a tether. For behind the little paved court once before mentioned, was a small turfed drying-ground, containing about four perches. The grass was rather long. Miss de Berenger had the pony tethered to a tree in one corner of it, that this excellent feed might not be wasted. The pony was not proud; he was accustomed to get his living where he could. Miss de Berenger added threepence a day to the boy Andrew's wages to attend him. He had already consumed the grass in the four corners of the drying-ground; on Monday he would be tethered on the little bit in the middle that he had not been able to reach, and, therefore, on Tuesday evening, when he had eaten all, Miss de Berenger, it was certain, would go away.

Miss de Berenger had no scruple in taking this grass, since Felix would not permit the cow to be turned in on it, because she was too restless to bear the tether, and if at large she got into the garden.

On Monday morning Hannah Snaith was admitted again to the rector's study. She began, "If you please, sir, Miss de Berenger — she proposes a scheme. I've thought it over, and —"

"Oh yes, yes," said Felix, setting a chair for her, and feeling as if his aunt had taken a liberty; "pray dismiss that from your mind. I believe my aunt felt that it would be awkward for me to be guardian to these little ones, unless they were near at hand." He forgot that his whole household would fall to pieces if she withdrew, but that was because he was thinking of her side of the question, not his own.

She answered simply, and without taking the chair. "Yes, sir; and that's what I feel too."

Felix looked at her.

"If my dear young ladies have a chance of living in your house, brought up with your little brother, sir, I seem to think I ought not to deprive them of it."

"But the fact is," said Felix, a slight tinge of red showing in his dark cheek, "I am not well off; a proportion of their money would have to go to pay me for their board."

She saw he did not like discussing the money with her.

"Sir," she answered, "when I'm your servant — as I hope to be — I can never talk so freely, and that, as I can now. So I'll say once for all, I expect I shall be lodged and boarded better than I have been, and I look to get the same sum for myself — twenty pounds. That is what Miss de Berenger thought."

"Yes," said Felix, looking at her. As she did not choose to seat herself, he was standing also. "Well, Mrs. Snaith, I suppose you know your own business best." And yet he seemed doubtful.

"I suppose I do, sir; but there's one thing it's fair I should say — it's my great confidence in you, sir, make me think I may."

"It's coming at last," thought Felix. "I will respect your confidence, Mrs. Snaith, whatever it may be."

"I'm not a widow, sir."

"No?" said Felix, in a tone of pity and inquiry.

"No, sir; my poor husband's alive. I fare to think people would look down on me, if they knew the truth; but not you, sir — not you."

All in a moment, after years of silence, she had been surprised into saying these words. His trust in her was so complete, he was so honorable — as far as he knew — that he had overcome her, and sick at heart, and choked with sobs, she sat down of her own accord, and wept and bemoaned herself before him with passionate, irrepressible tears.

"My poor husband is a convict, sir; he was sentenced for fourteen years," she said, when she recovered herself. "If I live under your roof, I fare to think you have a right to know it. But when I came into this room, I didn't mean to tell it, neither." She dried her eyes and almost coldly rose; her passion and sorrow were over.

"My poor friend," said Felix. "I am sorry."

That was all, but often afterwards the words, so quietly spoken, were a comfort to her. He meant them, and his pity would last.

"My poor friend. I am sorry."

"You'll keep it to yourself, sir?"

"Yes."

She had not told him what he had expected to hear, but her sudden grief had made him forget this. He had certainly thought of her as a widow, perhaps on account of that very phrase that she sometimes used, "My poor husband!" So in those parts of the country they always speak of the dead. The same phrase had made others also think of her as a widow, and if any had disparaging thoughts concerning her, they certainly never supposed she had a living husband to conceal, but rather that perhaps she had no right to the ring. For, of course, she had to pay for her great silence; her cautious reticence could not but be noticed, and why should people be so wonderfully chary of their words unless they have some secret to keep that is not to their advantage?

CHAPTER XIV.

NOW, Amias always comforted himself with a flattering conviction that he was no prig.

He would not touch strong drink, because he knew that the abuse of it made his countrymen wicked and poor, and he had thrown up his prospects, and made no use of opportunities to have them back.

He abstained, not that he was quite sure, but that he supposed, every instance of abstinence was likely to do good. He had thrown up his prospects on the spur of the moment, and almost before he had fully made up his own mind.

His conscience had, as it were, tricked him into action; it was afterwards that, revolving the matter, his reason approved.

It is a fearful thing for a young man to be thought a prig — almost as bad, so to speak, as being suspected of burglary. The companions of Amias were so kind as to admit that he certainly was no prig. What, then, is a prig? They did not exactly know, or at any rate they could not in so many words have characterized what here, in default of a better, receives this definition.

A prig is one who makes, and prides himself on making, such confident and high profession of his opinions, whatever these may be, that though he should act upon them never so consistently, his words will, notwithstanding, tower above and seem to dwarf his actions.

If this definition is a fair one, then Amias was the perfect contrary, the fine reverse of a prig.

With little more than an instinct towards the right,

and on the first admonishing of conscience, he had plunged into action; much as a man will plunge into a river to save some drowning person. When this last has been safely brought to the brink, his bold deliverer, with a quart at least of cold water in his own stomach, may reflect that the stream was stronger than he had supposed, the water deeper, that he is not a first-rate swimmer himself. What if they had both gone down together?

But when his sister says to him, "Tom," or "Dick," as the case may be, "you were rash, you might have been drowned," he has already had time to think the matter out, and justify the action by the result.

"Nonsense, my dear," he answers. "I am all right. I am glad I did it. I would do it again!"

And he would do it again. He knows enough of himself now to be sure that he certainly should do it again. Does he therefore, to keep himself out of danger, eschew the banks of the river? No, but in more perfect and accomplished style, he learns to swim.

There is nothing like action to show a man what he really is. It may have been hidden from this very young fellow's eyes that he cared enough for his own brother, the one he liked best, to risk his life for him. Till the decisive moment came he had not perhaps the remotest suspicion that he cared for human life in the abstract; and here he stands dripping, having risked his own to save that of an absolute stranger. For the future he knows all. He perceives the awful and mysterious oneness of humanity, how it draws the units to the whole. He is not independent, as he may have thought; he is a part of all.

This is why a man who has saved life, hardly ever boasts of it, or prides himself on it. Such, particularly the uneducated, will not unfrequently try to slink away, going silently, as if some knowledge or feeling had come to them that was not perfectly welcome.

On the Sunday after the fire a remarkable circumstance occurred. Sir Samuel de Berenger invited Amias to dinner. Sir Samuel had only returned to his country

place a few days previously. He went to church in all state, as he commonly did on a Sunday morning, and behold, there was Amias in the rectory pew. He was growing up to be a fine young fellow, taller than Felix, well made, and brown. He was looking about him as if he was pleased to be at home again, and not in the least conscious that he had made a fool of himself. Perhaps he hadn't, but it cannot be expected that his uncle or the congregation generally would think so.

Sir Samuel looked at him several times; quite naturally, and as if it could not be helped their eyes met. "Young dog," thought the old man, not at all displeased; "how perfectly he carries it off! You would have me think you don't care, would you!"

Amias, of course, could not know how many hundreds of times the old great-uncle had wished him back again. John was dead, Tom was gone; but that was not all. The old fellow constantly told himself, how the longer he lived the more his conscience became enlightened, and the more he suffered from the perversity of his father's descendants, who would not let him be just and generous to them. All that he meant, however, to do at present, was to make a clerk of Amias, and give him a salary; in fact, to condone the past.

He was always wishing to have him back again, and if Amias had known from the beginning that such was the case, it might have had a great effect upon him. That he did not know, appears, therefore, to be a good thing or a bad thing according to the judgment one may form of his conduct.

In the porch, after service, old Sam greeted his niece Sarah and the two little girls. He then spoke to Amias, who was behind, and, with a cordiality the more pleasant because it was unexpected, invited him to dinner.

Amias accepted. He was pleased that old Sam should thus make overtures of peace. His pride was flattered, for though he took special care not to seem aware that he was reckoned a foolish, wrong-headed young fellow, he felt it. When the wind blows strongly in one's face, it is difficult not to put down one's head.

Amias told no one in the house excepting Felix, who instantly said, "Why didn't he ask me too?"

"It was rude of him," answered Amias, "and queer; I was just now thinking so. If you like I'll send and decline."

Felix paused. It was no ridiculous feeling that he himself had been neglected which had led to the sudden exclamation.

"He's a mean old boy," said Amias, disrespectfully. "I hear he pays the fellow he got in my place even less than he paid me."

"That alone would be enough to decide him against what I suspected," thought Felix. "How absurd I am! — You had much better go," he said aloud. "Only keep clear of the matter you quarrelled about. It does not become you to dispute with such an old man, and at his own table."

"Oh!" said Amias, "you don't think I shall have a chance, do you? Most likely he has a dinner party, and wants me to make the table even."

When Amias arrived, however, he found himself the only guest, and felt that he could have enjoyed his dinner more if his dress-coat had not been so exceedingly tight; in fact, he had not worn it for a year. And, having been accustomed for that period to take his chop alone in his dingy lodgings, he was at first uncomfortably conscious of the footmen's eyes, their stealthy movements, and constant assiduities.

He had just been making a firm resolution that he would go out to dinner no more till he could afford a new dress-coat, when the last servant withdrew, after the meal, as quietly as a cat, and shut the door behind him. Then Amias began to perceive, as by a kind of instinct, that his old uncle had been waiting for this occurrence, that he had something to say, and was now about to speak.

So far as appeared, Amias was rather young for his years — as a rule, thoughtless. He still had a boy's delight in mischief. He did not love work; a boat race would rouse him to a ridiculous pitch of enthusiasm; a

cricket match was far more important than a Government defeat, or anything of that sort. As he now sat waiting, he again felt how tight his coat was, took up a particularly fine strawberry, and while cogitating with discomfort as to what could be coming, appeared to gaze at it with interest, and almost with curiosity.

"Amias," said Sir Samuel, with a serious and slightly pompous air, "your brother Felix has, of course, been made aware of my invitation?"

"Oh yes, uncle," answered Amias, diligently eating his strawberries.

"What remark did he make upon it?"

Amias, taken by surprise, looked up. It seemed out of the question to repeat the remark in question, and, of course, he had not forgotten it

"What remark did he make upon it?" repeated the old man. He saw that Amias looked a little confused.

"It was nothing particular that he said, uncle," replied Amias, in a blundering fashion. "I couldn't exactly repeat it to you."

"Why not?" asked Sir Samuel. He himself was not so much at his ease as usual. He never doubted that Felix had expressed pleasure at this move towards a reconciliation. Perhaps he had told his young brother he must make some sort of apology for the past. If Amias shirked the repetition of such a speech (and what other could Felix have made?) Sir Samuel did not see how he could continue the conversation. He looked hard at Amias, with an air of reproof and admonition; whereupon a slight tinge of red showed itself through the healthy brown of the cheek, and Amias blurted out —

"What Felix said was, 'Why didn't he ask me too?'"

"Very natural, nephew parson," thought the old man. "You see what I am about, and would like, if I take the boy back, to tie me down as regards the future; but I think I'll manage it myself, nephew parson, if you have no objection. — You would like to come back again into the country, I dare say, Amias, among your own people, and that sort of thing?" he continued aloud.

"Yes, I should, uncle, of course; I hate London."

"I take for granted that you regret the foolish escapade which — which led to your being sent away."

Amias looked up. The manner was rather kind; but he thought, "this is mean of the old boy; he is going to give me a wigging at his own table;" and instead of making a set answer to Sir Samuel's suggestion, he followed his own thoughts to a point where they became urgent for utterance, and then blurted out, "If I hadn't told you myself what I'd done, nobody else would have told you. You might never have found it out to this day."

"Quite true," answered the old uncle, still more graciously and pompously. "I have thought the better of you ever since for that proper straightforwardness. I have frequently said, when people have remarked to me on your folly, 'But there was much that was gentlemanlike in my nephew's behavior. I am not altogether displeased with him.' I say again, Amias, would you like to come back?"

"Back here?" exclaimed Amias, at last understanding him — "back to *the concern?* — back to you?" And his air of astonishment threw Sir Samuel off his guard.

"Yes, back here. Why not, if I am content to forget the past, and you are anxious to retrieve it?"

"You couldn't have a fellow back who is a teetotaler — a fellow that would stand on the beer barrels and preach at the people not to buy the stuff!"

"*You* stand on the beer barrels! *You* preach at people!" exclaimed Sir Samuel, so astonished at the grotesque picture that he could not be very angry; yet.

"Do you mean to tell me that you are so lost to all sense of what befits your age, and your rank in life, and your future respectability, that you can stand on a beer barrel and rant like a demagogue?"

Amias, in spite of himself, for he was very nervous, burst into a short laugh. "You are very kind, uncle," he answered; "and — well, I never expected it. No, I never lectured yet, excepting that once. But I should

if I came here. I am sure I could not help it! I am a great deal worse than I used to be; for now I wish all the gin-palaces were blown up, and I should be glad if half the beer barrels were kicked into the sea. When I went away, uncle, I felt as if it was extremely hard that I should be obliged to think about strong drink in such a way as to ruin my prospects; but now — I — I don't care. There must be some fellows to think the inconvenient things and do them; in fact, if there were not, the world would never get better. But I did not suppose you could be so kind and forgiving. I am very much obliged to you."

At the commencement of this speech Sir Samuel felt such rage and amazement that he was speechless. As Amias went on, much more slowly, and taking more thought, a sudden revulsion, caused by what seemed the strangeness of his words, made the old man shiver. All was useless. Why had he thus demeaned himself? His money was nothing, his kindness was set at nought; he was mastered by a mere youth, who had not a shilling. But when with boyish simplicity, and a sort of whimsical pathos, Amias went on to say how he had at first considered it hard that he should be obliged so to think as to ruin his prospects, and when he added, "But now I don't care," then Sir Samuel, worldly and shallow though he might be, believed that he was hearing of somewhat to be feared, and not gainsaid; something not of this world, though familiar to the Christian creed. It had asserted itself and been obeyed. It was very inconvenient, but it was always to have its way, and Amias did not seem to recognize it by name, or know what its strivings meant.

Rather a long pause followed. Sir Samuel poured himself out a glass of claret, and sipped it slowly. Amias having no wine to occupy him, and no fruit on his plate, looked hard out of the window into the lovely, peaceful park, and towards a wood. Little more than a year ago, he had robbed several feathered mothers there. He wished it was spring; and oh, how he wished this dinner was over! Oh that Felix had indeed been

invited to it also, for then he should not have had to tell him of it afterwards. And why did not old Sam speak? Was he so stumped with astonishment, that he disdained to say a word more?

Amias would have been much surprised if he could have read his old uncle's thoughts just then, and how, not without a certain reverence, he revolved in his mind a familiar sentence which begins, "Lest haply—"

He was rapidly calming. The matter had settled itself. He must find out some other way to benefit that family. Amias would be of no use to him as he was, and he would not take the responsibility of trying to change him.

When he did speak, it was so kindly that the words gave Amias a click in his throat, that made him miserably uncomfortable. He resented that too—would have liked a "wigging" better. Sir Samuel observed that he was in low spirits, and got more and more dull as the evening went on.

"I'd better go," he said, as the darkness came on, "if you'll excuse me, uncle. I've got to tell Felix."

"Felix will be vexed?" asked Sir Samuel, quite in a friendly tone.

"Yes," said Amias, gloomily; "of course."

Then the old man acted in a way to surprise his nephew and himself. He remarked to Amias, that about a year and a half ago he had promised to give him a nag. Amias remembered the promise, and how he had felt that the beast had received this somewhat disparaging name that no very high expectations might be formed as to his merits. "I shall give you the money instead," quoth the old uncle; and preceding Amias into the lighted library, he actually sat down to his writing-table, and then and there wrote a check for the sum of £38 10*s*. "Just such a nag as I meant to give you was sold out of my stable a week ago for that sum," he said. "There, Amias, you will understand that any displeasure I may have felt against you has ceased."

Amias accepted the check humbly. It was so un-

expected, under the circumstances, and so unlike the donor to give it, that he felt as if he had been put in the wrong utterly. He seemed to have made himself ridiculous and to be forgiven. He had thrown away his prospects now twice, and yet he had to feel like a sneak; he could not do it with a high hand. What amount of fun there might have been in the future must now be thrown after those prospects, and lost as they were, for of course he could never come and oppose old Sam in the town or in his own neighborhood now. No. And yet he did not even *wish* that his peculiar notions had never made a lodgment in his breast. Some fellows must have inconvenient thoughts; so it was, and so it would be.

The old man and the young took leave of one another. Amias went off toward home, telling himself what a lucky dog he was to have thirty-eight pounds ten shillings in his pockets, keeping up a smart run, and every now and then raising a boyish whoop or shout. He scarcely allowed to himself that he wanted to keep up his spirits, and was defying himself and fate, but when he left the open carriage drive, which was white and clear in the moonlight, and had to find and slowly feel his way under the trees in the solemn darkness of the summer night, he began to feel that ominous click in his throat again. One or two whoops meant to be hilarious came out in feeble and wavering style, and when at last he emerged from the wood and saw lying in its shadow the great fallen trunk of a tree lately felled, he was fain to throw himself upon it and cry out, "I know the old man will think this hard." He meant his brother Felix, and having so said, he dropped his face in his hands and sobbed for about two minutes as if his heart would break.

Moaning, and yet enraged, and deeply ashamed of himself — "To think that at my age I should demean myself to howl!" — he dried his eyes. Something moved before him, and, startled, he sprang to his feet. A man stood just beyond the shadow, covered with moonlight. Felix.

"Oh, it's you, old fellow."

"Yes. Don't knock me down."

"How did you know I was here?" exclaimed Amias, choking down the heavings of his chest with a mighty sob.

"I was coming to meet you, and saw you go into the wood. I shall think it hard, shall I?"

"Felix, you know I like you better than any one in the world — far better."

"Yes; but what shall I think hard? Has old Sam been proposing to you to come back? I thought he would."

"Did you, Felix?" said Amias, ruefully.

"If you accepted, I shall think it hard."

Amias immediately sprang at him, and hugged him.

"How could you think otherwise, you young scamp?" said Felix, when he was released.

"It's all right, then," exclaimed Amias, immensely relieved. The last remainder of the storm rolled off with a final heaving of the chest. "I was miserable because I thought you would be so vexed. If I'd only known," he added, with deep disgust against himself, "I wouldn't have made such a muff of myself. You'll — of course you will never mention it?"

"Certainly not," said Felix, affectionately.

Owls were hooting all round them; the valley was full of mysterious shadows and confusing shafts of moonlight; little hollows had ghostly white mists lying in them. Presently a large white creature, with eyes like a cat's, skimmed past them close to the grass, silent as a dream; a fluffy bunch of down, her newly fledged young one, after her. They disappeared in the wood. Amias, with a great whoop, gave chase, and Felix shouting after him with all his might to remember the pond, and keep well up the side of the hollow, the whole place seemed to wake up and fill itself with echoes, as if twenty De Berengers instead of two were in it, and were throwing their voices at one another.

When echo repeats a man's voice, she always gives it

with a difference. Felix could have declared it was his dead father crying out to Amias to beware of the water, and John de Berenger, who was lying in the Ceylon forest, that answered with fainter repetitions, "It's all r ght — all right — all right."

CHAPTER XV.

FELIX, intending to take new inmates, and finding that it was just a year since he had received the last, went over his accounts during the hours that Amias spent with Sir Samuel, and found, to his pleasure, that, having paid all his bills, he was actually the possessor of twenty pounds.

When, therefore, Amias emerged from the wood without having been able to capture the wisp of flying flue, the brothers, while they sauntered home, compared notes, and felt as if their worst days of restriction and poverty were over. Amias could get his watch out of pawn, and have new clothes. Felix could come up and spend a parson's week in London, find out how Amias was really lodged, and how he fared; also could enjoy himself after the peculiar fashion of zealous and painstaking young clergymen. "Always supposing that he keeps the money," thought Felix. "He is so full of scruples already that I shall suggest no fresh ones to his conscience; but if he doesn't see his inconsistency here very soon, I am much mistaken."

Amias exulted as he walked, and visions of lingering over book-stalls, and picking up old divinity very cheap, of attending many services, going to hear all manner of sermons, and sitting for hours and hours at religious meetings, flitted through the brain of Felix. What a pleasure it is to think that somebody here and there enjoys such meetings, and gets hints from them!

The brothers separated for the night in good spirits, and the next day Felix spent some hours in digging, while Amias, with a spud in his hand, sauntered about,

enjoyed the country air, and chopped at *dent-de-lions* and thistle-roots in the slightly disordered lawn.

Felix did most of the digging and raking, the real hard work that had to be done in the garden. He was extremely fond of that kind of exercise, but he would not weed or attend to the flowers; there he drew the line. He had one very large plot a good way from the house, containing about two rods of ground, in which he seldom planted anything, and which he, notwithstanding, dug over at least once a month. Sometimes, lost in thought, he would pause and pensively hang over the spade; then, with a certain fervor of industry, he would dig on with perfect enthusiasm, and slap the squares of mould as he threw each into its place, as if he lived by this work, and his master was looking at him. This was, in fact, his out-of-door study. Over this plot he mainly composed his sermons.

"You're filling my house," he said to his aunt, when she came to him on Tuesday afternoon, just as he left off digging — came to take leave, for, of course, she *did* go on Tuesday.

Amias, who had brought out a chair, was now sitting close at hand, looking somewhat moody, and at his leisure mending an old cherry-net.

"Yes, it's all settled," answered Sarah, who continued to feel a good deal surprised at the success of her plan. "And I've left an excellent long piece of strong cord behind. I brought it for the pony, to tether him with."

Felix looked surprised.

"Because," continued Sarah, "I have no doubt now that you will get most of the washing done at home; and it will be useful as a clothes-line. The drying-ground is cropped short, and all ready."

"Oh," said Felix. His ideas on the subject of a family wash were exceedingly hazy.

"Mrs. Snaith is a capital ironer. She likes nothing better than ironing, and has told me so," continued Sarah.

"Oh," said Felix again; and his aunt, observing a

certain absence of mind, in fact a kind of helplessness about his air in the face of these household matters, suddenly heaved up such a deep sigh as recalled him to himself, and he cast on her a glance of surprise.

She sighed again. "For indeed, under the present sad circumstances — sad indeed! — every yard of cord, and everything else, may well be said to matter."

"Sad circumstances?" said Felix, a little surprised.

Amias smiled furtively.

"Sad indeed! Amias so lost to everything!"

Felix began to dig softly.

"And as for you, Felix, I never would have believed, if I hadn't seen it, that you don't seem to care. I feel as if I had never known till now what you really were."

"There are many people in the world," answered Felix, rather dreamily, "who don't know what they really are till circumstances show them."

All this time Amias netted on, and neither of them took any notice of him.

"And a very good thing too," she exclaimed, "for some of us. If the pepper-castor could know what it really was, it would always be sneezing its top off."

"Some of us!" repeated Felix, gravely pleased with this illustration, which seemed to claim humanity for the pepper-castor.

"I only wish Amias had never found himself out," she persisted, "but had continued to think he was something quite different — and to act accordingly," she went on, after a pause, during which Amias preserved a discreet silence.

"I consider," observed Felix, "that every man has a right to his own conscience, and the more so as you cannot take it from him."

"Felix! Yes, I know your parishioners, some of them, believe the most extraordinary things."

"And I let them alone. One believes that Christian people ought not to eat pork, thinks the Mosaic law perfect wisdom for all men on sanatory matters, says almost all foul disease comes of our eating pork. I thought a great deal of her conscience till I found she fattened pigs for the eating of other people."

"Is that the woman who married an old man, and after she had escorted him to the grave, took a mere boy?"

"Even so."

"Well, Felix, I wish you were as tolerant to the poor publicans as to your parishioners. What right have you to interfere with the liberty of the subject?"

"Not the least. Have I any to interfere with the slavery of the subject?"

"That is merely a play of words, Felix. Not worthy of you as a clergyman, and a man of sense. Why should not the publican stand on his rights like other people?"

"Whether he stands on them or not," said Felix, laughing, "there is no doubt in my mind that the present generation will sit upon them!"

"There! you meant that for a joke. Yes! the notions of Amias are actually infecting you."

"What are his notions?"

"He is extremely one-sided," replied Sarah; "everybody must allow that. While he is considering how to reform the drunkards he quite forgets what is to become of the publicans. Thousands of them as there are — thousands and thousands."

"They are much to be pitied. But still, if it is the will of Providence, they will have eventually to go to the wall."

"Providence," said Sarah, not irreverently, "must be allowed to do as it pleases. But I do not and cannot see how you find out what that pleasure is till it is made manifest. I cannot see what right you have to run on in your own thoughts, and be so sure what Providence is going to do, and so eager to help before the event. Yes! I call that patronizing Providence."

"You are vexed, my dear aunt, that Amias should have, as you consider, thrown away his prospects again. That is what this means, is it not?" said Felix.

"And you are not vexed?"

"Well, no," said Felix, dispassionately. "Amias must, as the saying is, 'have the courage of his opin-

ions.' I did not put them first into his head — it is inconvenient to me that he should hold them so strongly — but I should heartily despise him if he threw them over to serve his own interests. And, after all, I suppose that even you have no doubt that two-thirds of all the misery and three-fourths of all the crime in the country really and truly and persistently do come of strong drink, and from nothing else."

"Oh, very well," exclaimed Sarah, in a high, plaintive tone; "pray fly out against your own family, if you like. Just as if the politicians did not frequently say that the country could not pay its way but for the duties on what you unkindly call strong drink!"

"Strong drink is not the only thing the country has to answer for. I hope to see the day when we shall take the making of opium, and the traffic in it, and especially the monopoly of it, to heart;" and thereupon he turned up the edge of the spade to his somewhat short-sighted eyes, and, as if he wished to shirk further discussion, remarked that it was rather blunt, and began to dig again.

Sarah heaved up another deep sigh, and shook her head, but neither of her nephews said anything; so, after a few moments, she exclaimed, with a somewhat theatrical start, "Well, I do not know, Felix, how much longer I am expected to look on while you dig. How many of these useless rods are there?"

"Three," said Amias, "including the one in pickle that you brought with you, aunt."

It did not suit Sarah to take direct notice of this speech; but Amias had lost his advantage of silence, and was made welcome to a good deal of advice, and to many comments on his conduct. "And so kind as my dear uncle has been to you, Amias!" she continued. "I know all about it. Yes."

"It does seem a shame, doesn't it?" answered Amias; "but it cannot be helped — I wish it could," he added, hastily. Then, when Felix looked at him with surprise, and Sarah with pleasure, he paused in his netting, and said with deliberation, "No, I don't;

that was a lie — at least, I forgot myself. Well, good-bye, Aunt Sarah; you'd better forgive me, for I shall never be any different."

Sarah took leave of him, and soon after this departed, Felix driving her home, and a chorus of laughter in the kitchen breaking out as her wheels left the yard, she having just explained the use that was to be made of an old hen-coop, which was to be turned upside down, she said, and play the part of a clothes-basket, the only one belonging to the establishment being still up a tree.

Felix had not gone forth to meet the temperance question, he had only accepted it when it came to seek him. He found it in his study when he came home.

Amias was there, so was Sir Samuel de Berenger, and they both looked so extremely serious that he was quite startled. "What is the matter now?" he exclaimed.

Sir Samuel looked a little flustered, but not in the least angry. When he spoke, his whole manner was decidedly conciliatory.

"The fact is, this young gentleman met me in the road, said he had something to tell me — asked me in here — and now he has nothing to say."

Amias laughed, but he looked very much ashamed of himself. "I am such a fool!" he exclaimed; and he certainly looked very foolish. "I am such a fool — nobody would believe it. I can hardly believe it myself."

"Sit down," said Felix; "we both know what you mean. Out with it."

Amias sat down and said humbly, "I beg your pardon, uncle."

Instead of asking what for, the old man continued to look pleasant. "Nonsense!" he said. "Say no more, and think better of it."

"I hope you'll forgive me, and try to forget this," said Amias, reddening, and at the same time pushing a crumpled piece of paper towards Sir Samuel without looking at him.

The old man took it up. It had cost him a pang to

give that check, and now here it was in his hands again. His first thought was one by which he often cajoled himself. "How extraordinarily difficult it is to do anything for this family!" His next thought corrected this. It was not worth while to keep it; it would make his conscience so uneasy. The more he did for Amias, the less weight, he instinctively felt, these temperance notions of his would have over him. Besides, Amias was a great favorite. He would give him another chance.

"You see," said Amias, as if excusing himself, "I have no right to cry out against — against anything, and then show myself ready to accept a benefit from it. It seems almost as mean as taking a bribe. No, I did not mean that; but I'm so blunder-headed I don't know what I say. I'm sure you meant nothing of the kind, uncle."

Sir Samuel at that moment knew that he had meant it, and that he would willingly offer one far heavier if by its means he could get rid of these scruples on the part of Amias; who, seeing the old man still looking kindly at him, went on, "I certainly did want that money, but I'm not half as badly off as you think. I've got an old necklace that Felix thinks I can sell when I go back to London, so that I hope I shall get on — and not be any expense to you, Felix."

"An old necklace!" exclaimed the baronet, as if he failed to understand the value of such property.

Felix explained that his mother had left several articles of jewelry in her dressing-case, that he had had them valued, and divided into three shares, one of which was for Amias.

"Sentiment would lead a man to keep his mother's ornaments," continued Felix, "but the poor cannot afford to indulge sentiment. Amias must sell his share. He never saw our mother wear this necklace."

"What is it worth?" asked Sir Samuel.

"My father bought it in India, and my aunt Sarah says she remembers hearing him say that it cost forty pounds."

"Then it is fully worth that now in this country, old jewelry being so fashionable," thought Sir Samuel. "Does it matter who buys it?" he inquired.

"No," answered Amias, in a dispirited tone, and without deriving any hope of a customer from this speech.

"Well," said Sir Samuel, with real kindness of manner, and still trifling with the check, "I'll buy the necklace. I will give the forty pounds."

Amias sprang up. "Uncle, you don't mean it!"

"Yes, I do. It's partly out of regard to Felix, who is likely to have enough on his hands with you and your scruples, and partly because, you young dog, your astonishing impudence amuses me. Nothing that breathes ever insulted me as you have done!" Here he laughed. "But you have the grace to be heartily ashamed of yourself, and somehow you make me feel that you cannot help it. There, fetch the beads."

Amias left the room.

"I suppose *this* transaction will stand?" he continued, addressing Felix, still looking more amused than irate.

"I suppose so," was all Felix answered.

Amias presently returned with a small red leather case, which he gravely opened and displayed before the customer — a faded white satin lining, on which was lying a delicate necklace of gold filigree work, with a few emeralds sparkling in its centre.

Then Sir Samuel drew forth his purse and pushed back the check to Amias, together with a sovereign and ten shillings.

"Give me a receipt," he said, for his habitual caution did not leave him; and he felt when he took it that he had done a noble action, for he certainly did not want the necklace. Also he felt as if he had got it for one pound ten, for even if it had not been mentioned, he must have found some way of benefiting that family, at least to the extent of his original gift.

A glad satisfaction swelled his heart as he put the case in his pocket; and as for Amias, he felt that, his

whole fortune being in his hand, he should certainly be no expense to Felix for the next two years, for he could well live on it, together with his small salary.

When Sir Samuel was gone, Amias looked furtively at his brother. How would he take the matter? What would he say now they were alone? As Felix took no notice of him, but continued for some time to mend the stumps of some remarkably bad old quill pens, Amias at last said, in rather a humble tone, "you'd better take care of this, hadn't you, Felix?" He put the check before him, continuing, "The one pound ten will get my watch out of pawn, and you might want to use some of this."

Felix put his hand in his pocket for his keys. "I shall want nothing of the kind," he answered. "But, just after a fire, I don't much like taking care of valuable bits of paper. Suppose we should have another? This must be changed into gold as soon as may be." He unlocked a drawer in his table and laughed. "Still, if it got burnt, I suppose the old boy would, if the thing was fully proved, give you another, or return the necklace."

Amias was greatly relieved at hearing him laugh; he longed to subside into ordinary talk without any discussion about his having renounced the present. But he altered his mind when Felix went on. "It's my belief that Uncle Sam is actually developing a conscience. It is very young and feeble at present, and if you had kept that money much longer, you might thereby have almost snuffed out its young life."

"And yet you said nothing to me."

"I thought nothing just at first."

"And when you did?"

"I do not always think that logic is to be used to force on a waiting soul."

"Then you do not think it would have been wrong in me to keep the money."

"No; but it would have been mean — that is, if he did offer it as a species of bribe — and it would have been ridiculous, because it would have been so inconsistent."

"But now, Felix, if we had originally received our proper share of our grandfather's money? Of course we should have lived on it."

"No doubt we should."

"Would there have been any harm in that?"

"You had better say, would there have been or would there now be any good, if you had it, in your flinging your share of it away?"

"Yes, that's what I mean."

"But where would you fling it to? Not to beggars, I hope — beggars, in any sense; for I for one believe that is to do infinitely more harm than good."

"Almshouses — workhouses?"

"Almshouses, and even workhouses, are full of old people whose own children are guilty before God, and are losing all sense of those feelings that raise families and hold them together, because they leave them there. Every right and natural responsibility of which you relieve a man, taking it on yourself, makes him less able to bear those responsibilities that nothing can relieve him of. If you could take all his duties from him, as we sometimes do, it would only make it certain that he would not then even do his duty by himself."

"I often puzzle over this kind of thing, Felix. If nobody is to inherit or use any money or anything that has not been earned with perfect honesty, and also by some noble trade or honorable means that does good and no harm, how are any of us to have anything — anything, I mean, but what we earn ourselves?"

"And yet," observed Felix, in his most dispassionate tone, "if, after a man's death, his relations were to sit in judgment on him, and were to bring out and make a great heap of all the things they thought he had not earned with perfect honesty, and were to allow the unscrupulous to have a free fight over them, each appropriating what he could for his own benefit, would that make the world any better than it is?"

Amias laughed. "And then there is the land," he observed.

"Quite true. How little land was ever originally

appropriated with anything like honesty! Often first got by violence, often long kept by violence, or extortion — Church land just the same as others."

"We are a bad lot."

"You have just discovered it?"

"No, I was always peaceably aware of it. But what is the good of that? Why am I obliged to be constantly thinking of such things? Everything in my lot turns them up for my consideration. I must think on them; and yet I know quite well that, even if I could do away with a wrong, it would not make a right."

Felix, who was still mending his pens, smiled with good-humored sarcasm, and, beginning to answer in a tone of banter, got more grave as he went on. "My dear young friend, I hope you don't think that the harboring of such thoughts shows anything original in the cast of your mind. I went through the same experiences at your age. That expression, 'He cannot call his soul his own,' has deep meaning in it, that the first utterer never knew of. Whence the soul is derived we have been informed, and some of us believe it; but many of us, to the last, decline to believe in any influence over it from its Source, other than what we are pleased to call a *religious* influence; and yet, comparing the soul to an inland sea, imprisoned as it were within us, we must allow that it often flings up on its strand, for our senses and observation to exercise themselves on, things out of its depths that we never knew to be there. You cannot call your soul your own; but, on the whole, it pleases me greatly to find that you are getting over the wish to do so — more satisfied to give way to these 'inconvenient thoughts,' which, if they were of a more solemn nature, and made you feel unhappy, you would more easily acknowledge for what they are."

"There's nothing in my being satisfied *now*."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I've got forty pounds by honest trade, and I not only feel now that I shall not be a burden to you, but I find that you by no means blame me. Why," continued Amias, with boyish self-scorn, "I hope you

don't think I would be such a prig as to whine about the giving up of my *own* prospects. I wouldn't have our fellows know how much I cared the other night even about your supposed annoyance — no, not for the whole price of that necklace. But, I say, Felix —"

"Well?"

"When you come up to London, you shall hear something that you don't expect."

"Not a temperance lecture from you, I hope!" exclaimed Felix, suddenly suspicious.

"Why not?"

"Because you are much too young."

"Well, I've promised our fellows."

"What have they to do with it?"

"You need not look so vexed. I tell you it will be a real one — perfectly solemn, and all that. Why, they have subscribed to give a tea to the people. We shall issue 1*d.* tickets for it. It will be the best lark I ever had. No; I mean no harm. It will be a capital lecture, though I say so. Several of our fellows helped me to get it up. And we expect you to take the chair."

"Do you mean to tell me that you are all taking this up out of real desire to do good, and in serious approval of the temperance cause?"

"No, Felix, I don't. We're going to give a tea-drinking at the beginning — there's no harm in that; then a temperance lecture in the middle — short and strong; and then we shall wind up with a few transparencies and a couple of songs. The tea will be just as good for the poor old women as if we were all in earnest, instead of only one of us."

"Why, you have just this moment told me that *you* should consider it a great lark!" exclaimed Felix.

"Well, so I shall; but do you mean to tell me, just after talking in the serious way you have, that when I am doing a thing I earnestly wish to do, because I fully believe it will produce good, and when I am willing to give up all sorts of things for its sake, I am not to see, or even to suspect, what fun it will be to us as well? You need not be at all afraid, Felix; we are going to

have it in Baby Tanner's parish. Mrs. Tanner approves, so I leave you to judge whether it will be right and serious enough."

Mrs. Tanner was the Miss Thimbleby who had married imprudently, and frightened Mrs. Snaith by her severe remarks. Becoming tired of the bucolic poor, she had caused her husband to take a miserable perpetual curacy in one of the worst parts of London, and they were both struggling with their duties there in the most heroic fashion.

CHAPTER XVI.

AMIAS, after his short holiday, accompanied Felix to London, and the temperance tea-drinking duly came off.

Finding that the reverend gentleman who has been called Baby Tanner looked forward to it in all good faith as something likely to elevate his people, and that he expected his old friend to take the chair, Felix agreed to do so — admired the simple industry of the good man, and the painstaking efforts of his ponderous wife to get the place into order.

"Everything is left to us," she explained. "None of the fashionable people run after Carlos."

"No wonder," thought Felix, when he saw this rosy-faced, single-minded saint trotting about after his school-children.

"But," the wife continued, "it is because we are so far from the fashionable localities that I never get any ladies to come and help us."

Mrs. Tanner knew very well that the youths who were going to entertain her poor women expected to entertain themselves as well, but it was very difficult to fill her mothers' meetings and get the women to church, or the children to school, if she never had any kind of treat to give them. All the tickets were to be in her hands, and she had the buying of the bread and the butter, and the ordering of the cakes and the tea; so she took care that there should be plenty of these commodities, and gladly agreed that the school-rooms should be at the service of the "committee" for this great occasion.

She had been governess to the head of the committee in his childhood, and Amias she had known slightly all his life; so she hoped they might be trusted — particularly "Lord Bob," who, as Felix was told by one of the committee when he inquired, was "a son of the Duke of Thingumy."

"And here he is with the bag," cried the youth, dashing downstairs on the eventful evening, while Felix with Amias and three of the committee were enjoying a "meat tea" in the little lodgings.

"Where's the prisoner?" exclaimed a tall, dark youth, rushing in and holding up a large camlet bag.

"He's all right," cried the second committee man.

"Not funking in the least," said the third.

"He'd better not. Escape is now impossible."

"Come on," quoth Lord Bob, seizing Amias; and the two disappeared into the small chamber beyond. There were no less than twelve committee men. This move enabled some to enter who had been standing on the tiny landing. The room was now absolutely full, but shouts of laughter being heard issuing from the chamber, the youths soon pulled its door open, and a man was seen within. Rather an elderly man, with rough gray hair, and a fine white beard. He was then in course of being arrayed in a black coat, which sat loosely, for it was a good deal too big. Lord Bob was buttoning it for him up to the throat. His linen collar was large and limp, and he had on a pair of loose black kid gloves. Shrieks of laughter greeted his appearance. Felix did not recognize him till he made a step or two forward.

"Amias," he then exclaimed angrily; but his voice was drowned in acclamation.

"What a jolly go!"

"He looks fifty!"

"Nobody could possibly know him!"

"Doesn't he look *respectable?*"

"My friends," said Amias, gazing mildly round, and wiping a large pair of spectacles on a white handkerchief — "my friends, this riot and these peals of laughter

are unseemly. Yes, Felix, it's no use your looking furious; you don't suppose my lecture would be listened to if I only looked nineteen? My friends, let us go forward."

Twelve against one, and that one silent from displeasure, was too great odds. Felix mechanically allowed himself to "go forward;" that is, he was among the youths as they thundered down the narrow staircase. The landlady, who was holding the door open, courtesied to Amias, not recognizing him. Felix, almost without his own choice, found himself in a spare omnibus, which had been hired for the occasion. He put off deciding what to do till he reached his destination. The driver and the conductor, both devoted teetotalers, had been exhorted by Lord Bob to attend the meeting, for the room was expected to be very empty. These zealous individuals promised so to do, and the youths, swarming outside and inside, caused them deep edification by lustily singing temperance songs. One gave such especial pleasure that they respectfully begged the young gentleman to repeat it. It began, "No, we are not ashamed of the cause — oh, we are not ashamed of the cause!"

Amias, a little daunted by the gravity and displeasure of Felix, tried to check them; but he could not say much, for he had taught them that song himself, having heard it sung by some excellent and single-minded folks, who pronounced it, "We *air* not ashamed," and having imitated that, as well as the peculiar burr sometimes imparted to their vocal exercises by the uneducated. The committee, of course, gave the song as they had learned it; and Felix had just decided how to act so as best, when he was called to the chair, to overpower the ridiculous element which at present was uppermost, when the vehicle stopped in a shabby street opposite the parish schools.

Remarkable fact! — a good many men, whose hands were not too clean, welcomed the committee with especial cheerfulness, almost with hilarity. Some insisted on shaking hands with them.

"We had a thought of taking the hosses out and

dragging yer in," said one gentleman. Others declared their intention of attending the meeting, "so soon as the ladies had finished their tea."

No fewer than two public-houses and a small gin-palace were visible, and placards of the intended meeting were ostentatiously posted up all over them.

Felix, being the last to descend, noted these circumstances, and had a short conversation apart with the driver and conductor, both of whom assured him that they were wide awake, and promised to act on his directions.

He then entered the large boys' school-room. "Remarkable fact!" exclaimed the Rev. Carlos Tanner. "It shows how deeply the minds of the masses are stirred on this great subject. Why, the very publicans, to please them, are advertising our meeting!" His eye then fell on Amias, and Lord Bob had the impudence, without mentioning his name, to introduce him with much apparent respect as an eminent friend to the "cause."

All the committee then hastened upstairs to the girls' school-room, where one hundred poor women, all looking meek, most of them pale, and many old, were waiting for their tea.

The committee, having piled up their hats in a corner, fell at once, and without a struggle, under the dominion of Mrs. Tanner. The noisiest spirits became calm; the number of babies materially helped to daunt them. Mrs. Tanner called one and another to cut up cakes; others had to tilt the great kettles, and carry round the teapots; some handed sugar, others put in milk. Pity and respect awoke in their young minds; they all behaved like gentlemen, and took real delight in seeing the enjoyment of the guests over the steaming tea and excellent viands.

Work was found for all excepting Lord Bob and Amias, each of whom fell under the eye of Mrs. Tanner, and knew that she knew all about it. She detected Amias at once under his disguise; she knew that Lord Bob had done it. These two young gentlemen were

therefore fain to sneak away from her "severe regard" of control, and press their services on such of the ladies as sat in corners, or had been quickest in despatch of victuals.

The guests had just arrived at that point when. to their regret, they were obliged to leave off eating and drinking from sheer repletion; and the committee, having divided the considerable quantity of food that was left into portions, were helping the ladies to wrap them up in handkerchiefs, or get them into their pockets when Felix came up, and had no sooner said grace, by Mrs. Tanner's desire, than Mr. Tanner followed, with a beaming countenance.

"My dear, the room below is so full — so absolutely full! Not one seat vacant, and people outside. It passes my utmost hope. In fact, we must have a second meeting for you, my friends, up here."

"Yes," said Felix, to the surprise of Mrs. Tanner, suddenly taking on himself to order matters. "It would be a good plan if I went down with you, Tanner, and the *lecturer:* and the committee was left up here to sing the temperance songs, and afterwards show the transparencies."

The members of the committee were nothing loth, excepting Lord Bob, who, prescient of some fun or mischief, declared that he ought to go down with the lecturer. The others, who had expected to sit through the lecture and have nothing to do till it was over, were naturally not averse from a plan which enabled them to begin at once, and the poor women, very warm and comfortable by this time, were right glad to stay where they were.

Mr. Tanner led the way to the boys' school-room. He entered first, then Felix. It was packed full. A low laugh of ecstasy broke out here and there, and was gone like summer lightning, while a voice cried out in tones of delight, "Here comes vicar, and here comes the temperance man. My! don't he look as if he never got a drop of anything comfortable." This compliment was intended for Felix, whose face, naturally dark and

thin, was never embellished by ruddy hues, and now looked especially grave.

The crowd was so hilarious that both the reverend gentlemen felt the impossibility of opening such a meeting with prayer.

Felix wondered whether Amias would have nerve enough to address an assembly so manifestly enjoying some secret joke. But he need not have troubled himself; nothing was further from their minds than to let the lecturer be heard at all.

Felix was, however, successfully called to the chair; but he had no sooner introduced the lecturer, than a deafening round of applause broke out, and was not appeased till four policemen stood up in different parts of the room, and, without regarding any individuals in the seated crowd, appeared to be looking with interest at the doors and the tallow candles in the chandeliers.

The five or six people who had actually come to the meeting from some misguided notion that they should improve their knowledge, or inflame their zeal by means of it, must have found such outrageous enthusiasm very inconvenient.

Amias began to speak, but at the end of his first sentence the cheers broke out again, so that he seemed to be acting in dumb show. Not a word was heard beyond the platform. Dust rose and caused a good deal of coughing, and presently there was cuffing and struggling in one corner, during which half the meeting turned round. Rough voices encouraged some one, some the other combatant, but they were soon hauled asunder by two policemen, and successfully marched out at two different doors.

"Go on," shouted Felix to Amias.

A good many men and lads followed the combatants; the doors banged incessantly, and two more policemen came in, which seemed to cause a slight lull, so that a sentence was distinctly audible.

Amias had, of course, learned his lecture by heart, and now delivered himself of this most inappropriate sentence —

For I have a right to suppose, my friends, from your attendance here, and your attention on this occasion, that your feelings are in harmony with that great cause which I have the honor — "

"Harmony!" shrieked a voice, far louder than his. "Bless you, sir, there never was anything like the harmony as pervades this assembly."

"Give the gentleman a hearing," cried a real sympathizer, very much put out.

"Give him three cheers," shouted another.

Amias was obliged to go on. It was trying work, for several men, in a high state of good humor, had mounted on the benches to propose resolutions; others kept pulling them down again.

"We air not obligated to hear the gentleman," cried one.

"Not by no means," shouted a policeman; "you air only obligated to keep the peace." This was said while a drunken man was being assisted to make his exit.

"It's a plot," shouted Mr. Tanner to Felix, hardly making himself heard amid the cheering and scraping of feet.

"Of course," shouted Felix in reply. "They've been treated by the publicans. Can't you see that many are half tipsy?"

"Then what are we to do-o?" shouted Mr. Tanner.

"Let them alone," shouted Felix, "till they're tired of it. Go on," he continued to Amias. "If you stop, and we try to retreat, there'll be a riot."

Amias never forgot the next half-hour as long as he lived — the dust, the sudden draughts of air, the banging doors, the guttering candles, the stand-up fights with fisticuffs that came off now and then in corners, and occasionally the sound of his own voice when there was a lull. Now and then came words of encouragement from Felix, together with a charge to go on; and he did so, half mechanically, not feeling any nervousness about his lecture. Why should he, when so little of it was heard? At last he could not but notice that

the room was less crowded. The dust being thick, there was more coughing and less cheering, and the spirits of the audience seemed to flag. Not being interfered with in any way worth mentioning, they began to think they had had enough of their joke. Portions of the floor became visible; there was even more noise now in the street than in the room. Amias, having involuntarily stopped to cough, one of the audience chose to suppose that the meeting was over, and, jumping on a form, proposed a vote of thanks to the chair.

"Wind up now," said Felix, and he made his bow.

The vote was responded to by a considerable show of hands.

"Those," continued the proposer, "whose opinion is contrary to him, hold up theirs."

About an equal show for this side of the question.

"This meeting thanks the chairman and likewise the lecturer," proceeded the orator, "and they air respectfully invited never to come here any more."

The police were slowly moving from the centre of the room towards the doors, and now that it was half empty, it became manifest that nobody liked to be last; there was a sudden rush during which a respectable-looking man, who had been standing with his back to one of them, enjoying the scene, got knocked down, and hurt; but they soon had him up again, and just as the last of the audience disappeared, and the doors were bolted behind them, the first of the committee came downstairs, and appeared at the back of the platform.

It would be a waste of time to attempt to describe how sulky the committee were when they found what a "row" there had been, and they not in it. The resources of the English language cannot convey the darting flashes of eleven pairs of eyes, set in the brows of eleven youths between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one, which, with natural indignation, they hurled at the back of Felix, as he stood in the front talking to the policemen.

"Well, I hope you're satisfied, gentlemen, with this temperance work of yours," observed the most impor-

tant of the two policemen still present, while he wiped his hot forehead.

"You see, sir, you're new to the work," remarked the other, accosting Mr. Tanner; "but this elderly gentleman," pointing to Amias, "he did ought to have known better."

The light was none of the best. The policemen went on, first one, then the other.

"There's two cases for the lock-up, and a broken arm. You saw that respectable man knocked down? I expect you'll have to go before the magistrates and give your evidence."

"I dessay you don't expect to go triumphing home atop of that vehicle of yourn?"

The committee looked as if they did.

"It's now a-waiting for you outside. I consider you'd better not be draw'd out of the neighborhood. What breaches of the peace we'd hed already would be nothing to speak of compared —"

"Now then, gentlemen, if you please," they both exclaimed, as there was a thundering knock at the principal door. "They're all ready for you there, so you follow us out at the back, as fast as your legs will carry you."

The committee, deeply disgusted, had to obey. They came out into a playground. One of the policemen had a key, and after fumbling awhile at the lock of the door, let the party out into a miserably dark and shabby court, marching them through its empty length, and through several winding ways, till they found themselves in a considerable thoroughfare, and close to a metropolitan station.

Whilst waiting for the train, Amias was divested of his wig and beard, and all the party, very much disgusted with things in general, set forth in a silence that for some time was absolutely unbroken.

Lord Bob spoke at last, after deep cogitation. "If it hadn't been for Mr. de Berenger we should all have got ourselves into a jolly row."

But Amias was dull in his spirits; he did not like

the hint that had been dropped by the policeman, that he might be called on to give evidence before the magistrates. He had seen the fighting and scuffling, and he had seen the man knocked down.

"Bob," he said, "do you think the magistrates can do anything to us if it turns out that I was disguised, and that we did it all for a lark?"

Lord Bob was sixteen months older than Amias. Sixteen months count at that time of life. He reassured his young friend. "I do not see that they can. It was straight and fair. Mr. de Berenger says he knew the moment he saw the placards that the publicans would have the best of it. There were two larks, you see, and they both flew up, as it were, and met, and had a tussle in the air. Neither lark was prepared for the other. The publicans thought we were ordinary temperance fogies. They did not want us, of course, and they treated a lot of fellows to cheer themselves hoarse, and utterly quench us with applause. Still, though the publicans outwitted us, our lark came down without loss of a feather, and theirs got badly pecked."

"If it hadn't been for my wig," said Amias, doubtfully, "I could have looked any magistrate in the face."

"Did the meeting find it out, though eighteen 'dips' illuminated it?"

"No."

"I heard Mrs. Tanner say to Baby, 'Dark, my dear! How can the room be dark, when there are eighteen dips in the chandeliers, exclusive of the four on the platform?' Baby was all in his glory, excited quite out of himself, and reckless of tallow; but when he found she was inexorable, and would have no more melted for this great occasion, he trotted gently away. Well, you allow that the meeting did not find it out. Did the police, then — I ask you that?"

"Not one."

"When you appear in court in your ordinary rig, they'll declare you are not the man. You will then fall on your knees and confess the whole. The magistrates

will inquire of me, 'Why did you aid and abet this young fellow in disguising himself?' I shall reply, 'To make him look respectable.' They will answer, 'Nothing can do that.' I shall desire leave to show the contrary. We retire. Tableau in court. You, in your wig and beard, your loose gloves and spectacles; I with my arm out as a sign-post point. Two policemen faint, crying out, ''Tis he!' You immediately begin your lecture. The court listens enthralled, and before they know where they are, three attorneys have taken the pledge."

"Bob, it's no use. I feel like a fool."

"So do I. I almost always do. I think the reason must be—"

"What?"

"Why, that I *am* a fool. But," he continued, "if you think I am a greater fool than yourself, or if you think I think that I am, I can only say you never were more mistaken."

Felix was seated in the same compartment with these two, and, with hands thrust into his pockets, was deep in thought; but when Amias said, "Do you think the magistrates can do anything to us?" surprise arrested his attention, and the shadow of a smile flitted over his face. He felt what a strangely boyish speech this was, and did not care to comfort his brother and Lord Bob on the occasion. He considered that a little anxiety on the point might be wholesome. He felt the incongruity between this and the absolute self-possession Amias had shown, his sensible readiness in yielding to orders, the naturally fine action which, even under those adverse circumstances, had shown itself now and then. He began to experience that attentive state of mind towards Amias with which we regard things curious and uncommon. He began to perceive that he never would be like other people. He had been a manly little fellow in his childhood, but childhood was not gone, dead, buried, and forgotten. Felix was vexed, not having sufficiently remarked that the finest characters are never of rapid growth. He thought Amias

ought to have done with childhood; but he was a graduate in nature's university. Nature is wiser than the schoolmaster; she educates, but she never crams. Her scholars do not go up to take their degrees; their degrees come to them.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE Rev. Felix de Berenger was called upon to appear before the magistrates and give evidence as regarded various scuffles and riotous crowds, which had resulted in some broken bones, and which were directly caused by, or at any rate had taken place at, a temperance meeting over which he had presided.

It however came out that the three publicans in the immediate vicinity had freely distributed a great deal of liquor, and had encouraged their customers to give a lively reception to the lecturer; also to take heed not to let his voice be heard, but to do this in a cheerful, fair, and unexceptionable fashion. They had likewise encouraged the crowd to take out the omnibus horses, one of which, being frightened, had become unmanageable, got away, and dashed through the window of a sausage-shop, whence he withdrew his head with a necklace of sausages where his collar should have been. A long string of sympathizers with the publicans had got a rope and hoped, by means of it, to draw the omnibus down the street, and a great assembly, whose best friends could hardly have called them sober, hung about waiting to help them; and when at last they discovered that the lecturer and committee, instead of mounting the machine, had gone out another way, they were indignant, and went and smashed the windows of the smaller public-house.

Why this? Well, it appeared that the landlord of this very public-house had lent the rope, though it was declared by several ringleaders that he must have known what the police were after; for, in short, when

they came round and remarked that the gentlemen were off, they were seen to wink at him — *ergo*, he must have meant by means of this rope to occupy the people, and at the same time balk them of a very innocent piece of fun.

The policemen here earnestly declared that he had not winked, and the magistrate crushed him. At the same time, he was very pleasant with Felix, and let it be evident that he considered the temperance cause rather ridiculous than otherwise.

Amias and Lord Bob were within call, but the inquiry seemed nearly over, and Felix hoped that a sarcasm or two directed against himself would be all the temperance cause, as represented by the late affair, would have to suffer; but at last an unlucky question was asked, to which he could not frame a true answer without exciting surprise. Another followed, and thereupon both the youths were called, and the whole ridiculous affair came out.

But they were not dealt with in the same fashion as the publicans or the chairman had been. They were both very fine, pleasant-looking young fellows; there was something boyish and ingenuous about them. They excited amusement, and they took pains to remind the court that no one had found out the wig; it therefore could have had nothing to do with the riotous proceedings. This was so manifest, that they got nothing but the very slightest of reprimands, and that was half lost in the cheering, which, however, was instantly put down by the presiding magistrate.

This was a great occasion for Amias, though he little thought so at the time. He and Lord Bob were retiring, both feeling more foolish by half than they had done the previous night, when the latter was accosted by his maternal grandfather.

This old gentleman, whose sole distinction in life was that the duke's sons were his grandsons, was allowed by them all to be the best grandfather going. He was specially proud of this one, and when he saw him giving his evidence, screening his friend and letting it be seen,

in a blundering and ingenuous fashion, how little he cared for the temperance cause, and how much he loved a lark, then the grandfather felt that of all the dozens of larks after which his grandsons had craved aid of him and got it, not one had come before his notice that was so innocent.

Innocent indeed it had proved — far more so than had ever been intended — for it cannot be supposed that a dozen youths would have lent themselves to a cause they did not care for, if nothing more attractive than has appeared had been in the programme.

No; they looked indeed for a temperance lecture, and Amias had stipulated that the first half of his should be given in sober sadness, and should contain as many trenchant sentences against drink as he, with all care and much elaboration, had got into it. But the second half?

They came down, as they thought, in plenty of time to hear the second half. Amias, being a great mimic, fully intended to give them the treat of hearing capital imitations of no less than three lecturers with whom he had made them more or less familiar.

There was to be an interval; the lecturer, making his bow, was to sit down and partake of his cold water, while the committee was to be called on by the chairman for some songs.

They counted on having a very dull, stupid audience, who would never get as far beyond surprise as to reach suspicion, and would not find out how the lecturer, beginning again in the style and with the voice of the great Smith, and imitating his anecdotes and his frown, would gradually and cautiously develop himself into the more stately and gentlemanly Jones, with his glib statistics and see-saw motion of the hands; and then toning down Jones in delicate gradations, would carefully take up a third voice and work it up, and work himself up, till, with coat-tails flying, and eyes ready to start from his head, he concluded with the impassioned screams of the fervid Robinson.

And the parson-brother of Amias, — what an element

of joy it added to the programme, that it would be impossible for him to remonstrate, or in any way to interfere!

There he would be, seated in all state, looking every inch a parson. He would not find out at first. They should behold his air of startled puzzlement, then his awakened intelligence, not unmixed with indignation, and finally his vain attempts to look stolid, and his alarm lest the audience should perceive that they were being made game of.

What might occur after this they left to the event, but they by no means wished that their little plot should be discovered. No, they trusted that Amias, and his brother, the parson, would manage better; for, if not, the entertainment could hardly come off again. If Mr. Tanner found out, it was of no consequence, they thought, unless he told Mrs. Tanner.

No wonder they were sulky as they drove home; circumstances had been hard upon them.

But to return to the grandfather. Felix escaped to his book-stalls when the inquiry was over, and he drove Lord Bob and Amias to his house to lunch, where he was disturbed to see that neither of them drank anything but water. The slightest of Scotch accents emphasized his words not unbecomingly. "Ye were as thin as a lath always, Robert; and if ye drink nothing but water, ye'll be just liable to blow away."

"Quite true. Why, I'm so light, that the wind almost takes me off my legs now. I must be weighted, to keep me down." He plunged his hands in his pockets. "I must put some pieces of lead in these," he observed; "or perhaps gold would do, grandpapa. Have you any about you handy?"

They always called him grandpapa when they wanted money, and he always laughed and thought it droll.

Lord Robert received ten sovereigns in his palm. "And now, grandpapa, when you pay the bill —" he observed, as he counted them.

"What bill?" cried grandpapa, with pretended sharpness.

"Why, the omnibus horse fell down and broke his knees. If you will go in for these larks, like a rare old bird as you are, why, you must pay for them. And the man who broke his arm used to earn thirty shillings a week, when he was sober, though he never thought of working on a Monday. I'm afraid you're in for that thirty shillings a week till his arm's well. I don't know what you think, but that's my view, grandpapa."

"Yes, yes," said the grandfather, still rather pleased at this dependence on him than grieved to part with his cash. "*Noblesse oblige*, Robert, when it has a grandfather."

"Quite my view again."

"But I'll need to investigate these claims before I pay anything."

"Oh yes," answered the grandson; and now he naturally looked on his liabilities in this matter as settled to the satisfaction of all parties; that is, he felt that honor demanded that, as he was the eldest of the committee by several months, as well as the ringleader and the one of highest rank, the proper person to pay was *his* grandfather.

The story of Amias was already known to the grandfather. It had been told, however, with a difference, as thus:—"He was heir to his uncle, a baronet, and a jolly old brewer, the richest man in the county: had been allowed to spend as much as he liked, you know. And the old boy had such covers! Never expected him to go in for work, excepting about as much as a fellow might rather like than otherwise. Well, and then he happened, entirely for fun, to pull down a temperance lecturer, and mount the beer barrel he was standing on and lecture himself. And the old uncle was in such a rage; he said he was insulted, and disinherited him, and turned him out of doors. It is thought he will leave his money to his granddaughters. And now, you know, De Berenger has nothing but his beggarly pay. He told me the other day that he often got his dinner at an eating-house for elevenpence — it was either elevenpence or thirteenpence, I know; and yet he's

one of the jolliest fellows going. I came to know him through little Peep. He was one of little Peep's chums."

The young man called little Peep was one of Lord Bob's second cousins, and had been his schoolfellow. He was little physically, but as a fool he was great.

Amias had been duly warned that little Peep was never to be chaffed, reasoned with, or remonstrated with at all, it having been found by experience that there was much more fun to be got out of him by letting him alone.

But, sad to relate, little Peep's career in the same Government office which had the advantage of young De Berenger's services had been cut short; in fact, he had been called on to take possession of a moderately good estate in the north of Scotland, in consequence of the death of a distant cousin, and the end of this was that he fell under the dominion of two elder sisters, and, as far as could be now known, he was, to the grief of his old friends, conducting himself almost like other people.

And yet it had come to pass that little Peep had introduced Amias to Lord Bob, just before he took his lamented departure for the north, and then it had come to pass that Lord Bob had introduced him to the grandfather, who not only carried him home to lunch, but liked him, and pressingly invited him to dinner.

Amias had got his dress clothes now, and did not care who invited him. He went to dinner several times, and there he met people of all sorts — radical members, rising barristers, authors, newspaper editors, and dandies of fashion. They fed his opening mind with large discourse, they stimulated his sense of humor by their oddities; the radicals helped his plastic mind to the certainty that he was a conservative; the authors drew him to themselves. As for the newspaper editors, he regarded them almost as kings, and would have long gone on doing so, if some of them had not made it plain to him that they shared, and rather more than shared, his views concerning them.

Oh, what a curious place the world is, and what a number of things are found out afresh in it! What faded old facts stand forth in startling colors, as wonderful and new, when youthful genius gets a chance of sitting still while it passes, and making unnoticed studies of it.

Does it really matter nothing to the possessors whether their rank and standing came first a mark of grace or of disgrace? Apparently not. And these sons and these cousins, who have inherited a great name in science or in literature? The dear progenitor sits, as it were, like an Egyptian of old, at all their feasts. He never gets any rest in his grave; they have got him out, and are all hanging on behind him, using his dead body as a rammer with which they push. Strange that, because he was wise, they should think he must ram a hole for them to enter, and show themselves fools where they please.

And here are two politicians. They have been having a battle royal, each for his party. One of them almost flew at the other's throat, in the papers, and now they meet with undisguised pleasure, and talk about flies. So they only quarelled for their constituents then, and now they revert to friendship and their fishing.

Amias found plenty to feed his observant mind the first time he dined at grandpapa's house. The next visit afforded him just as much interest and as many speculations.

During the third evening he came to honor. An editor spoke to him! He was sitting quietly and hearkening to the discourse with modest attention, when with a certain kindliness, as the conversation ended, and the other converser moved away, this royal personage turned and said, "I dare say you have been very much bored. Eh?"

Amias brusquely declared the contrary. The subject was one that was just beginning to interest people. He had read a book or two already that bore on it, and he made such intelligent comments on them and the conversation, that the editor said, "Not bad."

And then somebody else coming up to talk, he kindly admitted Amias to the conversation, and once called on him for his opinion. He gave it with his natural fervor, and with a touch of humor which was always ready to his hand. When they parted, he somehow believed himself to understand that if he wrote a letter on the point in question, for this said editor's journal, it might possibly appear in print.

This was only a hint, but Amias had heard earlier that the matter wanted "airing."

Two days after a letter actually appeared in the journal. Amias, with a leap of the heart, saw his signature, "A. de B." He read the letter with greedy eyes, and a dread lest it should have been altered that would have taken away half his pleasure. But no; it was put in just as he had written it, and he sighed with joy and pride.

In the joy of his heart Amias sent the newspaper down to his brother. In a few days other letters appeared; some of them referred to "A. de B.," and agreed with him. Amias wrote a second letter, but as he was reading it, with the peculiar delight that it always gives a young writer to see himself in print, a letter came from Felix, full of affectionate remonstrance. Felix admonished his young brother that he ought not to interfere in matters too high for him, nor to set his heart on influence, before he had learned to get a bare living. Most religious people who are restricted to certain places, and particular lines of duty, as well as kept back by small means, are beset with such fears for the more adventurous spirits about them, not considering how much more dangerous it is for youth to lack a worthy interest, and find low things tempting, because life is empty and poor. High things to each mind are the things above it. Let each put forth his hand for those on its own level. It is difficult to think of things as high in the abstract. The dining-room table is high to a black-beetle, but a camelopard can easily look in at the first-floor window.

And so it came to pass that, through Lord Bob's

grandfather, Amias first met a number of interesting people, and then found his own level, which was a much more important matter. He soon went to visit his newspaper friend, and from him had introduction to all sorts of men — got among painters and authors, from great historians and poets to the merest literary hacks, and commenced dabbling in literature himself, picking up a few guineas here and there for articles in periodicals and magazines. The aristocracy of culture began to take him up; the Bohemians, luckily, would have none of him, and he soon dropped away from the world of fashion.

Lord Bob, however, continued his fast friend. They suited each other too well for severance to be possible. How young they were when they began to lecture in public (not by any means always on the temperance question), whether they dared to disguise themselves or not, whether they succeeded to their satisfaction, and how many allies and accomplices they had, are not matters that it is needful to enlarge upon here:

At the same time, it would not be violating any confidence to inform the reader that little Peep, keeping up a correspondence with his old "chums" in the Government office, and having the celebrated lecture sent down in manuscript to read, wrote in reply, to the intense delight and astonishment of all concerned, and informed them "that he saw things in a new light, and he and his second sister intended to take the pledge."

"Good little fool!" exclaimed Amias, with such a sense of shame and compunction as almost forced tears into his eyes. He remembered with what gravity he and Lord Bob had pressed into little Peep's hand at parting a long letter on his duties as a landlord; and this he had taken in good part, though he owned that at first he was so elated, what with a moor of his own, and real gillies, &c., &c., that he had not read it.

"Innocent little Peep!" exclaimed Lord Bob to Amias. "Only think of his giving himself the airs of a reformed rake! And he thinks we are all in earnest as well as himself. I must write and undeceive him — let him down gently."

"You had much better let him alone. I don't see that you have any right to interfere with my first convert," answered Amias.

And Lord Bob, reverting to the known power of little Peep to act himself best when not interfered with, did let him alone, and the consequence of that was that little Peep wrote very soon to ask if he might deliver the lecture himself in the next town. His sister thought he was quite old enough, and he thought it might do good.

Amias curtly consented, feeling very much ashamed; but Lord Bob, to whom the correspondence had, of course, been shown, wrote and counselled little Peep to return the lecture first, that "the usual directions" might be written on it. This was accordingly done, and sent back marked here and there, "Now drink a whole tumbler of water, to show your zeal for the cause;" "Here shed a few tears; three or four will do;" "Here stamp — the right foot is the proper one to use," &c., &c.

Amias never knew that this had been done till little Peep returned the lecture, having read it in three neighboring towns with great pride and joy. He said he wished the directions had been simpler, for he found it almost impossible to carry them out; but Amias would be glad to hear that several people had signed the pledge, and he supposed that was the principal matter.

"It is a blessed thing to be an ass!" said Amias, on reading this to Lord Bob. "Little Peep has got more than twenty people to leave off drinking, and we have never got one."

CHAPTER XVIII.

IT was two years after the lecture before Amias again appeared at the door of his brother's parsonage, two years of growth, expansion, and improvement for him, both mentally, morally, and physically. He was a fine young man now, tall, brown, and broad-shouldered, and with a deep, manly voice.

Felix, in the mean while, had been almost stationary. He had, it seemed, reached the limit of his mental growth, and he had come to consider the parish as his world, and the care of it as his life.

Amias, in his mind and thought, lived with that brother, in that parsonage, close to that church: they were the scenery in which he acted out his speculations, and Felix was his audience. They were as familiar to him as his own thumbs and fingers, and yet, the moment he saw them, he was, notwithstanding, aware of a change. The furniture struck him with a sense of surprise; it was so simple, so sparsely distributed about the rooms. And yet he remembered that it had not been changed. And Felix! — dear old Felix wore his newest coat when he came to London, but now he looked what he was, a country clergyman with narrow means.

But then there were the two little girls and Dick to be seen. Let us take the former first, as having been the cause of every real change about the place. They were most beautiful creatures, their voices soft as the cooing of doves. They were growing tall, but they ran about the garden after Felix as if they had been tame fawns.

Ann Thimbleby and her sister were gone — they had found a vegetarian family to teach — and a widow lady

had come to the village who acted as daily governess to the little "Miss de Berengers." Old Sir Samuel came frequently to see them. He was treated almost with uncivil silence and coldness by Mrs. Snaith. Sir Samuel loved them and they loved him; he thought they grew more like his son John. The fact was, that he had imparted a something pathetic to his son's face, out of the pathos in his own thoughts of him, as one whom he loved and who was dead, and that something he now and then beheld in these children's eyes. He liked them to come to him and sit on his knee, and insist on his kissing their dolls; it pleased him that they stroked their soft hands over his beard, and took liberties with his own particular pencil-case. Amabel once begged a silk pocket-handkerchief of him to make a counterpane for her best doll. He gave it, and was exceedingly snappish to Mrs. Snaith, when she brought it in, the next time he called, washed and ironed, and begged to apologize for "Miss Amabel, who had taken a liberty, bless her."

Felix had not the least thought of ever parting with Amabel and Delia, probably as he took for granted that they must *somehow* be John's children; he thought that was the reason. And yet, if the whole truth had been confided to him, he would, perhaps, have kept them; they were dear to him, as amusing as kittens; they gave him no trouble, and their love was demonstrative and fervent, without being at all exacting.

When he was tired of them he could always say, "There, go to Mrs. Snaith," and, of course, Mrs. Snaith took good care that he should have as little trouble with them as possible. It caused her, some years before, many a jealous pang to see how they would go and peep in at his study window, and stand there awhile for the mere pleasure of looking at him. She never told them not to do it, though the end of it generally was that he would open the window and give each of them a kiss, that they might go away and play contentedly. They always wore lockets that Sir Samuel had given them. Felix thought he knew and they knew what was in them; but once, when he asked Amabel, she shook her head and

whispered to him that she was not to tell. He supposed it to be John's hair.

Sir Samuel had decided to leave a younger son's portion between them in his will, but not to allow Felix anything for them in the present. He had been told what they possessed, and knew it was sufficient. It was best to let well alone. But he was improving, and, as his nephew had said, developing a conscience. He showed this in a very convenient way; for when Dick was of a proper age, he came to see Felix, and reverting to his old grievance, that he could do nothing for Amias, he proposed, entirely at his own charge, to put Dick to school.

Felix, who had fully perceived that Amias, with his views, ought not to accept any of the old man's money, was yet far from any such extreme notion as that he himself was shut out from deriving benefit from property which, but for an informal will, would part of it have become his own. He therefore accepted the proposal. Sir Samuel sent the boy to a public school, and paid all his bills also. This, he felt, could establish no claim on him when school days were over; and the result was that the benefit came to his own family, though all the time he felt convinced that he was rewarding the more remote relative for goodness shown to those nearer to him, his grandchildren, who, if he once began openly to provide for them, might in the future put forth a claim — expect, perhaps, when they grew up, to come and live with him.

Though he was such an old man, he always supposed himself to be living when they grew up; he fancied himself at last investigating matters, and of course discovering that they were his son John's offspring. He went through imaginary interviews with their future suitors, in which these gentlemen, requesting to be told his intentions toward his granddaughters, were made to settle handsome sums on the young ladies, and content themselves for the most part with future prospects.

In the mean while, the poor invalid, his eldest son, died at last at Mentone, and his second son Tom,

already the father of three little girls, sent them home to England. It seemed a perversity of nature, certainly, that he should have so many children of the wrong sort, but he fondly hoped soon to add a boy.

These children — pale, fair little creatures — were established with their maternal grandmother when they came over from Burmah. Sir Samuel went to the north of the county to see them. They had the delicate complexions and reddish hair of his family, but he saw nothing interesting in *their* likeness to their father. He loved Amabel and Delia best.

The children of a drunken shoemaker, who was a convict! It seems unfair that they should have been the cherished visitors of an old man's dreams; but there is often a strange and curious balance in these matters. He gave where there was no claim; but then he had, with all his might, prevented and thought scorn of the marriage which would, in all likelihood, have caused such a claim.

He loved these little aliens to his blood, but at least they loved him in return, and just in the kind and degree that he did. They loved with the drawings of personal approval and quite unreasonable preference. He was nice; what he did was right. When he came, they divided their cherries with him; when he went away to London, they cried. He was not called grandfather, of course, but he had a nickname that he liked just as well.

The simple fact of this equality of affection would have made it sweet and worth having, even if the truth had been discovered. There would not have been that pathos in it which hangs about most friendship bestowed beyond the limits of the family. In general, affection is not equal; one bestows with fervor and cannot help it, the other receives and rewards as well as he or she can.

Amabel was now twelve years old, and Dick was a fine boy, much grown and improved. During his holidays the three children were constant companions. They were all young for their years. Amias rather liked to have them at his heels, as he strolled about

the garden with his cigar. His gentleness with them endeared him to Sir Samuel, who, with the usual perversity of human liking, continued to find many good qualities in him, and to regret his contumelious withdrawal, mainly because he had withdrawn, but partly because he had shown, especially of late, an excellent capacity for getting on alone.

Mrs. Snaith, during those years, had greatly improved; she had been drinking in deep draughts of peace. Her voluntary descent had been rewarded with the obscurity she needed. Her renunciation of her two children, also, was only in name; she possessed their hearts, and, excepting when Sarah interfered, their confidence also.

Sarah disparaged her sometimes. "Such a dear kind nurse, my pets, but no occasion to tell *that* to her; ask Cousin Sarah. Little girls are not to be too intimate with servants."

The children listened, tried to obey, and for the moment gave themselves airs; but nature was too strong for them, and they stole away, when Cousin Sarah was not looking, to "help" Mamsey when she was working; or, tall as they were growing, to delight themselves with her caresses, or get her to sit on the rocking-chair and take them both at once on her knees.

Whenever there was anything the matter with them, they were wholly her own. They divided their smiles with others, but all their tears were shed in her arms. Sometimes she wept with them; the child for its passing grief, the mother for her infinite misfortune — the lost and outraged love of her youth, the disgraced life, the self-renunciation. But after all, when they had wept together, the child, perfectly consoled, would fall asleep on her bosom, and the mother, with impassioned love, would admit to herself, as all keen affection must, that if she could not have both, she grudged their joys far less to others than their tears.

Amias, who had hitherto taken his aunt Sarah for granted, just as she was, felt surprised to find her

remarkably foolish; for long absence, without destroying memory, enabled him to look at customary things as if they were fresh. He was surprised no less to remark the complacent affection with which Felix regarded her. She was more slender, more sprightly, and more gayly dressed than ever, and she was obviously most welcome to do and say in his house whatever she pleased.

Sometimes, when he was strolling about the garden, cogitating on some political or literary matter of real importance, he would come upon a scene which for the moment would fling him back with almost painful suddenness into the past, and make the later years of his life look all unreal and distant to him.

"Yes," Sarah was observing one day, when he came upon them thus, "it is a subject, my dear Felix, which frequently engages my attention. Certainly, as you say, it does not do to generalize too confidently on it, and yet my experience is by no means small."

Felix, with the shadowy smile in his eyes, through which a little harmless malice shone, was calmly digging his plot, and she, comfortably perched on a large flower-pot turned upside down, was looking at him with her head on one side.

"What do you think?" she inquired; "and what does Amias think?"

"About what?" Amias not unnaturally inquired.

Sarah was too deep in thought to give him a direct answer.

She said, "I've got a new gardener, called David. Yes. Now, we can hardly suppose that Providence interferes, when a child is named David, to change the color of his hair if it was going to be black; but it is a remarkable fact, that you will find a man of the name of David always has sandy hair, or, at any rate, light hair."

"So he has," said Felix, calmly. "It cannot be denied. But don't you think it may be because David is almost always a Scotchman? They almost always have light hair."

"No," said Sarah. "But I think, as you said, that one can hardly dogmatize about it; it's a mysterious subject."

"He is always a Scotchman," persisted Felix; "and if he isn't, he ought to be."

"But that," continued Sarah, "is only one out of hundreds of names. Does it result from the eternal fitness of things, that a woman named Fanny (always in a book, and generally in real life) is frivolous? Did you ever meet with a ponderous, or a managing, or a learned Fanny? All literature shows what Fanny is! In fact, I believe it is the observation of this which causes people not to use the name half so much as they used to do. Then, again, some names are quite gone out, because it has been observed that the girls who had them always became old maids — Miss Grizzle, for instance, Griselda was once a favorite name — Miss Penelope, Miss Rebecca, Miss Tabitha."

Felix made no reply, good or bad, to this speech, though he seemed to derive a certain satisfaction from it.

"I wouldn't call a son Lionel on any account," she continued, "unless I wished him to go into the army; nor Robert, if I objected to his taking holy orders; nor Godfrey, unless I knew beforehand that he would be fat, and nothing I could do could prevent it; nor Gilbert, if I wished him to pay his debts."

"I don't think there is so much in it as you suppose," said Amias, as gravely as Felix might have done.

"But that," answered Sarah, "is because you have not sufficiently gone into the matter. Yes; we cannot expect to understand everything in this world, nor how things act upon one another."

"I can understand," said Amias, "that a man's name, if he connected a certain character with it, would act upon him; but I cannot understand that he would act upon his name."

"But human knowledge is making great strides," observed Sarah. "Look at the things they have discovered in the microscope. It takes some of these four

generations to come round again to themselves! And yet they are atoms so small that if garden worms were as much magnified in proportion, they would reach from here to London. I think, therefore — yes — that we ought not to despair about finding out and understanding anything, though at the same time, as I have just said, we are not exactly to expect it."

Amias found them at peace in the rectory, and he left them at peace. There was a certain air of leisure about them all. When Jolliffe picked the peas, she took her time over them, and strolled up to the bean bed, before she went in, to ascertain if they were coming on, which they did, also at their leisure; while, perhaps, Felix, at his leisure, was proceeding into the church, to be ready for some rustic bridal.

Amias spent three weeks with his brother, "partook of his victuals," and also of this leisure, which he found extremely sweet. When he departed, he thought he would come again very soon, and so felt a very bearable pang at parting.

But he did not come soon; it fell in his way to write some articles in a magazine, which brought him into sudden notice.

The youth who had with such extreme difficulty paid his tailor's bill, and eked out his means of living by the sale of an old necklace, began to find himself in easy circumstances. He was *somebody*, and he had the unusual good fortune to be very soon "looked up" by another *somebody*, and offered an appointment which kept his powers almost always on the stretch and his mind always improving; for, besides research, it demanded of him a great deal of travelling.

In the mean time Dick did well at school, Sir Samuel mellowed and improved, Felix almost stood still, and Amabel and Delia grew to be prettier than ever; but Mrs. Snaith, just as the former reached the age of sixteen, fell sick, and was all at once in low spirits without apparent cause. She had a startled and nervous way that surprised all about her; did not like to go out of doors, and, when alone, was often found shedding tears.

"What is it, Mrs Snaith, darling?" asked Delia when, one day coming into the room still called the nursery, she found Mrs. Snaith standing there, and hastily folding a newspaper and putting it in her pocket. "What is that rubbishing *Suffolk Chronicle* to you?"

"Who told you it was the *Suffolk Chronicle*, Miss Delia, dear?"

Sarah had long ago hinted to Mrs. Snaith that she would do well to add the "Miss" to Delia's name. She had always called Amabel "missy" from her birth.

"Why, I saw it, Mamsey."

Delia was fourteen. Both the girls took after their mother in height, though the poor cobbler had given them his beautiful face.

Delia approached Mrs. Snaith with her arms wide open, and calmly wrapped them completely round her.

"I do think they grow longer every day," she observed of the said arms.

Mrs. Snaith was trembling; Delia's cheek was laid against hers, with a certain moderation of unimpassioned tenderness.

The mother stood perfectly still, but a few heart-sick tears fell down her face. She was consoled by the quiet closeness of Delia's embrace, and in a minute or two she released one hand, and, wiping them away, said, "But I must finish the ironing now, my beauty bright, else your frills and laces won't be ready for Sunday."

Delia kissed her, and, withdrawing a little, looked at her. "You don't get enough air," she said — "always moping in this room. When we were little, you used to iron sometimes out of doors, under the walnut trees. Oh, Mamsey, do it now!"

"I fare to think it would fatigue me to carry out the things now."

"Dick shall carry them," exclaimed Delia, and she ran out of the room.

She was unusually tall for her age, nearly of the average height already. Her face was dimpled, her hands were dimpled; the whole young growing creature

was supple and soft. She had a mischievous delight in teasing Dick and reigning over him, but no one living was so fond of him. Sometimes when with Dick she tried to remember that she was "getting quite old," but with Felix she was still as playful as a kitten.

"What time does Mr. Amias come?" asked Mrs. Snaith, when, with more commotion than was needed, Dick and Delia had brought out the ironing-table, and covered it with a blanket and a white cloth. They set it and some chairs under the great spreading walnut trees, in the little yard paved with coggle-stones, which was divided from the garden by a long, low rockery.

"What time?" repeated Amabel. "Well, there is no train till five, and Coz is going to wait at the station for him till he comes. Coz is gone to the ruri-diaconal meeting."

"I suppose we must make ourselves fit to be seen," said Delia. "No doubt he thinks he is a great gentleman now."

"Fit to be seen!" exclaimed Dick. "Why, these are the most stunning frocks you ever had."

The girls were dressed in white, and had some blue ribbons about them; but Delia's frock was crumpled. She looked like a tall, overgrown child; her long locks were carelessly tied back with a blue ribbon, and her delicate cheeks were slightly flushed with exercise. Amabel, on the other hand, looked fair and quiet in the lovely shade of afternoon; her ribbons were fresh, her frock clean. Excepting when she talked or smiled, she had still the wistful look of her childhood. Delia had it even at this moment. She and Dick had brought out each an iron. Mamsey was telling them where these were to be placed, and while Dick obeyed, Delia slowly approached, hers close to Dick's ear. He naturally started back, and she, as if she had only been making a quiet experiment necessary for the occasion, set it down and ran off for something more, he after her.

But Mamsey, for whom all these preparations had been made, had hardly begun her work, when she became so tired and faint, that she was obliged to sit

down, and so it came to pass that Amabel and Delia insisted on setting up as ironers on their own account, and there ensued a great sprinkling of lace and muslin. Dick got a sprinkling also, to make him grow, and was sent continually backward and forward to the kitchen to bring the irons, to bring tea for them and for Mrs. Snaith, and to bring more chairs.

"None of them will ever be happier," thought the poor mother, as she gazed at her two young queens, trying their fair hands at the ironing-board, clapping the lace between their palms as they had seen her do, and making Dick feel the Italian-iron with his great brown hand, lest it should be too hot for them when they pinched up the frills and set them daintily upon it.

In the golden shade of afternoon their light-hearted sweetness consoled and soothed her. She was weary of thinking on one only subject, and repeating over certain words, which at first reading them had almost crushed her; but now she escaped to a little welcome rest, while Amabel ironed and laughed, and Delia flitted about, offering a great deal of advice and not doing much, though Dick contrived to give himself the air of one diligently helping her.

CHAPTER XIX.

AND so it fell out, in the very crisis of the ironing, at a quarter before five of the clock, just as Amabel held up delicately a long piece of lace, which, to the deep interest of Dick and Delia, she had managed to finish without either crumpling or scorching, two gentlemen came round from the front of the house — Felix and another.

It was a still, hot afternoon, but the ironing-table was well within the golden shade of the walnut trees. Mrs. Snaith, in her black alpaca gown, made a due foil in the picture for two fair creatures, busy and important. So did Dick, for, fine boy as he was, he had in some small degree that awkwardness, that nearly loutishness, which often afflicts the youthful man when his legs and arms have grown almost out of his own knowledge, and when, having become suddenly somewhat ponderous, he frequently finds his movements making more noise than he intended.

Dick was inclined to be shy and shame-faced about himself when the girls teased him. It seemed a shame that he should grow so big, when Amabel would ask him for one of his gloves to carry aloft on a stick, as a sufficient parasol; or when Delia would remark that his shoes, when he had grown out of them, should be presented to the little seaside place often mentioned here, that a grateful country, sinking them in the sand, might use them as dry docks for the fishing smacks.

And yet the joy and glory of being with these two girls was already enough to draw him away from the football and cricket, the rowing and running, which, when at school, he delighted in.

So Amabel was holding up the lace when Amias, coming round a corner, first saw with his eyes that there were two young ladies in the garden, and then perceived with his intelligence that they must be Amabel and Delia.

He looked at Felix with a flash of surprise. Amabel was such a fair young creature, and Felix had all these years, in his letters, or during his visits to London, never said or written anything about her which appeared to show that he knew she was beautiful, or even that he was aware she was fast growing up.

The brothers advanced. Mrs. Snaith rose and stood in her place. Delia ran forward and kissed Felix, and Amabel, serene, not surprised, moved only a step or two towards them.

Felix had been away two nights. She also kissed him, as an accustomed and not, as it seemed, specially interesting ceremony to either party.

Amias was absolutely startled, so that a fine red hue showed itself through the brown of his cheek. How would she greet *him?*

In a manner that quite satisfied him. He raised his hat; and she quietly, as though she took a certain number of moments that could be counted to do it in, looked at him with sweet and modest interest, as if she might have been thinking about him beforehand, and then she held out her pretty hand and smiled.

Amias felt for the moment almost as shy as Dick, who, called by Felix, now came blundering up; and the brothers laughing, and each surprised at the appearance of the other, shook hands with hearty pleasure; one thinking, "I did not know he was a swell," and the other, "This fellow will be six feet high before he has done growing."

"We did not think you would be so early," said Amabel.

"We could not have been," answered Felix, "if we had stopped at this station. We met two stations off, and there Amias hired a fly. He wanted to see the country, and drive through the park."

"You might have met Uncle Sam," said Dick; "he has been here to give Amabel her riding lesson."

"Coz," said Delia, pouting, "isn't it unfair that he never asks me? I can never ride."

"There's the donkey," answered Felix, smiling and gently lifting Delia's face, by putting his hand under her chin. She was manifestly the favorite.

"But he won't go!" exclaimed Delia, throwing such tragic tones into her voice, and such needless pathos into her face, as seemed to show that she had nothing more important to use up her feelings for. "Oh, Coz, you did say that some day you would hire a pony and that I should go out riding with you."

"We'll see about it," said Felix, basely putting off this desired event to some perfectly indefinite date.

Delia sighed, and Mrs. Snaith now beginning to put the ironed lace, &c., into two light baskets, each of the girls took one and went in with it, she and Dick following with the chairs.

Amias stood a moment surprised, and yet he had known the girls were still with his brother. What could he have expected? He roused himself, went into the church with Felix, and was shown a lectern that "old Sam" had given. Sir Samuel appeared to play a much larger part than formerly in the life of the rectory. Then he went into the garden and all over the premises. He asked no questions about the girls, but he thought the position of Felix as their guardian began to be decidedly curious.

He did not see them again that night; they had dined early, and they did not appear till the next morning, about half an hour before service time. To say that they looked fairer, fresher, and more graceful than ever, would not half explain the complicated impressions they made on him. They also both appeared more childlike than before, though Amabel, as befitted her age, was mindful of the presence of an almost strange gentleman; while Delia, regarding him as the brother of Felix (who was quite an elderly man), made no difference in her usual style of talk because of him.

"I want my sermon-case," said Felix.

"Then Delia shall fetch it. Do, Delia," began Amabel, persuasively.

Felix was seated on the sofa, already in his cassock. Delia beside him, had put her arm through his. He was reading his sermon over, and took no notice of the girls.

Amabel was moving across the middle of the room putting on her gloves. As she buttoned one, she turned her head slightly over her shoulder. She was manifestly observing how her train followed her, and how her sash floated after.

Felix, having finished his reading, looked up, and, as if supposing that he had not been heard, told Delia again that he wanted his case.

"But Amabel will get my place if I fetch it," said Delia; "and it really is my turn to walk with you to church."

"You walked with Coz on Wednesday," answered Amabel.

"But that," said the unreasonable child, "was a saint's day, and I don't consider that it counts."

"Fetch the case, goosey," answered Felix. "I remember that it is your turn."

All this time Amias, standing on the rug, amused himself with looking on, and none of them took any particular notice of him.

Delia, now satisfied, started up with a laugh of loving malice at Amabel, and presently brought in the sermon-case; then turning her head, much as Amabel had done, "Look at our new frocks, Coz," she exclaimed—"our frocks that Cousin Sarah gave us; don't they look sweet?"

"Your new frocks?" repeated Felix, turning with no particular intelligence in his glance. "Oh—ah—new, are they? Well, they seem to fit well enough, as far as I can see;" then he added, like a good parson as he was, "But I wish, when you have new habiliments, that they were not always put on first on a Sunday; they take your minds off from attending to the service."

nursery, a sudden pang overtook her, and she stood still as she had done the previous day, and wept.

She stood a few minutes, sobbing and shedding heart-sick tears, before she could rouse herself; then she went into the nursery, unlocked a drawer in her old-fashioned bureau, which had been saved from the fire, and took out the *Suffolk Chronicle*, to read for the fiftieth time the miserable news it had conveyed to her.

"To her that have been looking out for tidings from me this fourteen years and two months and six days. I am that vexed to be a misery to you, that are the niece of an honest man and my good friend, that, if I dared, I would leave this thing to take care of itself; but 'tis best to write for your sake. And, first, you will understand that, if he that has a right to trouble you had behaved himself better, you would have had this news full four years ago; but for several years he behaved very bad, and so was kept in to the last moment that the law allowed,

"And came up to where I am, and demanded his wife and children and the property; and I told him the children had died, as I was very sorry indeed to hear was the case soon after we parted. And he pretended to be vexed, and said he were a reformed character, and had the impudence to offer to pray with me, along of my not being in a good frame of mind, for I had the gout in my hand, and was that put out with him, that I was not particular in my language. The end of it is, I am vexed to say, that he went to Bristol, the last place, as he understood, where you were heard of. And so no more, but God keep you, wherever you be, from a canting hypocrite. — G."

Mamsey sat down in the rocking-chair, and thought over, as she had so often done lately, the terms of this letter. Bristol was north-west of the place where she dwelt, and it was not on the same line of railway. But oh, what a little place England is! and how could she be sure that no one whatever knew of her whereabouts?

The Christian names of her children were so uncommon, that, in spite of her wretched husband's belief that

they were dead, he would not hear them again, if he came near her, without suspicion. What should she do — what should she do? It seemed to her unbearable misery to leave her darlings, but it would be cruel indeed to expose them to any risk. Her husband was at Bristol. Should she fly to London and bury herself there?

She was yet thinking on this subject when the family and Jolliffe came home from church, and something to attend to brought her a little welcome relief.

At the early dinner she waited at table, and Amias noticed a kind of sweet and sad dignity in her manner. When she spoke, she used the homely English of her native town, Ipswich; but her movements had a grace that he could not fail to acknowledge.

Not hurried, not inattentive, she yet appeared to be dwelling in some inner world while she went about her duties; and he saw that, when she stood a few moments at the sideboard, her eyes were examining the two girls and Felix, almost as if she was learning by heart their features and air. A singular thing this, since she was so familiar with them. And a singular thing, too, that a guest should occupy himself so much with the servant; but he perfectly observed that he was not alone in being so occupied.

There is no dignity so touching and so telling, as that of those who have renounced all. They expect nothing of any man, that they should excite themselves in order to please him. They cannot be patronized, for no one has anything to give that they care to take. Mrs. Snaith was doing her best, and the words "Here we have no continuing city" were present to her thoughts; but she had wept her last tears over the news, and there had come over her mind a great calm.

She had never looked better. Her cheeks were still slightly flushed, after her weeping fit; her brown eyes looked more moist than usual, and had a more tender lustre from the same cause. Did she know that Felix looked at her from time to time? Amias could not be sure, but he felt that there was something unusual about her, and he wondered what it was.

She had no sooner withdrawn after dinner, having set fruit and wine on the table, than Felix said to Amabel, "Mamsey looks a little better to-day."

"She said she had slept better, Coz," answered Amabel; "and Mr. Brown says there is nothing the matter with her, if she could but think so." Poor unconscious daughter!

Mr. Brown was the doctor.

"Yes," observed Delia, "I heard him tell her that she really must rouse herself. He said he had never met with a person more free from all disease, or one with a finer frame."

"Nothing could be more opportune than our going to the sea just now," observed Felix. "I dare say the change will bring her round. We all want a change now and then."

"And Cousin Amias says he will take us out fishing," said Delia.

Dick was immediately devoured with jealousy.

Amias listened to all this with something like jealousy also. Here was Felix, his nearest relation, far more important to him than any other person living. And this parsonage, rather bare, rather shabby, and quite out of the world was still his home; but of what importance was he in it? Felix was more interested in these two girls, who were always with him, than in his brother. Why, even a servant who made his life comfortable, was probably more interesting!

Was this inevitable? Perhaps it was: and if so, he would not grumble at Felix, but he would come more frequently to see them all; he would make himself of more consequence to Felix.

Felix had a great respect for this half-educated woman; her sweet humility touched him. He never asked her any questions, but her evident love for Amabel and Delia made him feel sure that her unhappy marriage had brought her children and she had lost them. As years had gone on, he had more and more left her and Jolliffe to arrange all household matters as they pleased. No man could well be less master of his

house and his belongings, but all was so well done for him that he scarcely knew it. And now Mrs. Snaith was ill — at least she appeared to think so — for she had asked to see a doctor, and for some little time had been very nervous, and sometimes faint. This had changed the manner of Felix. He had felt and expressed some anxiety about her. After studiously preserving a certain style of speech and bearing towards her, he had unconsciously changed it, and if any one about him had been observant excepting Amias (which was not the case), it would have been as evident to all as it was to him. Felix felt that hers was probably a sickness of the heart, and that it had to do with the convict husband; but he asked her no questions, though he frequently felt what a gap she would make in his household if she withdrew, and how impossible it would be to supply her place.

CHAPTER XX.

AS Felix and his party left the church on Sunday morning, Sir Samuel de Berenger had accosted them. His manner to Amias had been extremely cordial, but though Felix noticed this, Amias did not; he had become in some measure accustomed to cordiality, and the ancient *fracas* between him and his old great-uncle was of no consequence to him now. He had an income which was sufficient for his very simple style of living; he liked his work, and found time, when it was over, for a good deal of public speaking, at religious, philanthropical, and also political meetings.

Amias was a good deal altered; he was no longer afraid as to what people would think of him. At first his conduct had kept well in front of his convictions; and he had been subject to intervals of misgiving and forlornness, when these convictions, overcome by times of apathy, or pulled back by arguments on the other side, would appear to recede and leave him all by himself in the forefront of the battle, while he most wanted them to back him.

But when the returning tide of conviction came up again, it was all the stronger for new knowledge and wider experience. He had lived through his self-scorn, and the scorn of other people, in the notion that he must be a fanatic, had said things that he had smarted for afterwards, as suspecting that they were ridiculous; and now, behold, the very people in his little world who had made most game of him, were quoting them as familiarly true. They had only been a nine-days' wonder, and while he was blushing still for them on the tenth, they were adopted by most of those who had not forgotten them.

As related to his religious profession, an almost opposite course had not the less brought him forward to the open confession that he was a sincere Christian.

How extremely hard it is for a young man to make such an avowal! But he, naturally most reticent and afraid of himself, had notwithstanding lived such a life, and aimed at so much that was good, that he had fallen among those who, making an open profession of religion, took for granted a good deal concerning him that he had hardly dared to believe himself; but when he had once learned from some of them to admit that "*every* good gift cometh from above," it was but a point of thankful humility to acknowledge that he was under heavenly guidance, and that, once understood, other things followed.

All Sunday Amias held to his notion that his two child-beauties were lovely by reason of their array. On Monday morning he saw cause to change his opinion; for, before breakfast, he met Amabel in the garden in a morning dress, made of some sort of pale blue cambric. She was bringing in a bunch of blush roses to set on the breakfast table, and she was holding up a very large rhubarb leaf by way of parasol.

She looked prettier than ever. Amias was alternately attracted and repelled. The first feeling drew him to her side; all nature seemed to smile so on her sweetness. She reminded him, in that secluded spot, of a fair lily shaded by its own green leaf. And then the second feeling came like a smart box on the ear. He did not like to be so suddenly overcome; it was not in his plans; and he knew that, if he did not look out, a very inconvenient sense of incompleteness would soon lay hold upon him, and when he left her, his heart would be torn in two, and the best half left behind him.

Now, what was the part of a wise man in such a case? Why, to decide that he *would* look out. So Amias felt, so he did decide; and, in pursuit of this resolution, he went on and made the circuit of the garden. But that caused no difference, of course. Amabel, not being present, was only the more there. She was everywhere. The young growing things about him

were lovely, for they were like her. The old steadfast trees were interesting, as in contrast to her. And here was the donkey! The very donkey was interesting, because she often tried in vain to make him go. Amias, having thought even this, burst out laughing at himself, and felt that he, too, was an ass.

Then he went in, and Delia was there. He saw the girls meet, and wish each other good morning with a kiss. After that came family prayers, and then, during breakfast, a long discussion between Dick and Delia about the delights of going to the sea. They talked a great deal of nonsense in the prospect of this treat, and then Amabel struck in, and she, too, had a childish joy in the prospect. They argued with Felix as to which of them must go inside and which might go outside the coach that was to take them part of the way. They were almost petulant over his decision. Amias listened, and felt as if he was now safe. She was a child: — who falls in love with a child?

What packing there was that day! — what condoling with the donkey, with the young ducks, the dog, and even the cat, because they were to be left behind! "Though our cat is such a cold-hearted person," said Delia, "that even if she knew she would never see us again, she would not leave off mousing for a single day." And then what rapture they got out of their anticipations of the boating and the bathing! It was worth while, Amias thought, living in a country parsonage for years, to find such joy at last in a simple change.

So the next morning they all set forth, and even Mrs. Snaith was in good spirits. She was refreshed by bustle, and glad to feel that every throb of the engine took her further from Bristol. She had suffered much, and now counted the miles with exultation till the party stopped at a station where the coach met them, and she was made, nothing loth, to take one of the despised inside places, which assured her the shade and seclusion that she loved.

She was manifestly better. She did not now wait at table, and the two brothers seldom saw her except-

ing when she attended the girls to the shops or to the shore.

Tom de Berenger's three little girls were established near at hand with their grandmother and their governess. They were tall for their years, very fair, and as playful as Delia. No one but old Sir Samuel observed any particular likeness between the two families. He had several times pointed it out, and had been pleased to see how familiarly the three younger girls depended on the two elder, and how they met with the tolerant, easy affection of relatives.

Felix and Amias were treated (much to the vexation of the latter) more as uncles and general dispensers of favors than ever. But at the end of about a fortnight Amias managed to effect a change. Amabel ceased to carry home buckets of forlorn sea-anemones, left off grubbing in the cliffs for fossil shells, and sometimes even wore her best hat on week-days. On such occasions Amias was always in attendance, and the three little girls would be sent off to some desirable place for finding cornelian and amber, while Dick and Delia, who considered it very dull work to saunter along looking at the yachts and keeping their feet dry, would soon fall back, the latter on pretence of emptying the sand from her shoes. After this they generally joined the little girls, leading their revels and enjoying their much more lively society.

Amias got on a great deal better when they were gone. He taught Amabel various things, some by word of mouth, some with his eyes. She took a good deal of teaching, but she mastered the lesson at last.

Amabel was not "wasteful," she did not "cheapen paradise." When Amias had taught her to blush, which she could do now most beautifully, she seldom looked him in the face while he talked, and so she blushed the seldomer. But her wakening life and keener thought sometimes caused her almost unbearable pain.

For Amias had twice gone away and spoken at certain meetings some miles off. He was sufficiently far from

his old uncle's neighborhood to do this without violence to his sense of propriety. England was large enough for his speeches, and for all the good influence he could hope to exert, though he did keep his distance from the old man's door. He had a decided affection for him, and Amabel increased it by the loving way in which she would speak of him. In fact, Sir Samuel showed himself at his best when he was in the company of his so-called granddaughters. His natural courtesy was never more agreeably shown than towards the young ladies of his own family. He taught Amabel to ride, himself holding the leading-rein as she rode beside him; and once, when Delia had been found by him in the school-room "with fair blubbered face," left at home by herself because of the outrageous badness of her French exercise, he set to work with the dictionary, and puzzled his old head, together with her young one, till the others came home from their picnic, and the exercise could be "shown up" perfectly right.

How natural, if all had been as he thought it was; and how natural that the girls should love him! Mrs. Snaith often saw the evidences of this love with a pang, but she could do nothing, and she hoped that, as her girls had enough to live upon, he would not leave anything to them; he had never held out any promise of the kind. If he did, she felt that she must speak; but she put off the evil day, hoping it might never rise.

Amabel had often heard of the opinions that Amias took such pains to make known. Sometimes she had read reports of his speeches in the newspapers, read them aloud to Sarah de Berenger, and heard that lady's indignant comments upon them.

But these had caused her no pain. She thought in her heart that Amias was right, but she was never asked for her opinion, and Amias was nothing to her. As for Sir Samuel, it almost seemed to her imagination as if he had never heard of such a thing as a temperance lecture. Such things did not belong to his world. This world, her world, and that of Amias, had not hitherto come together — each had been kept remote

from the other — and now she began to perceive that they were all one and the same world, after all.

And now — now that she knew Sir Samuel was coming in a few days to see his granddaughters and stay close by — now that some of the local tradespeople had congratulated "Coz," in her hearing, on his brother's eloquence and zeal — now, in short, that Amias had singled her out as the object of his admiration, and had made her feel that a man of his age was not so very old, after all — now she felt a keen sense of discomfort, when, having asked him what he had said at these lectures, he would answer and astonish her with the easy calm of his conviction, when he would tell her how he had tried to impress his audience with the misery of the drunkard, and the sin of the drunkard-maker.

"But all these people who keep the gin-palaces, that you consider so shocking, I do not think you ought to call them drunkard-makers," she observed once, when he had been talking thus. "They make a mistake, no doubt."

"What is the mistake?"

"It may be that they think more such places are needed than is really the case."

Amias had a more fervid nature than his brother, and he seldom thought of things in the abstract, but of the persons who had to do with them.

"But if it takes about thirty thousand drunkards," he answered, "to build up the fortune of a great spirit-distiller, and give a comfortable livelihood to the landlords and families of all the gin-palaces and public-houses where the liquor is sold, ought that fortune to be built up, ought those men who sell to live on the misery of those who buy?"

"Thirty thousand drunkards!" exclaimed Amabel — "thirty thousand! But they are not obliged to drink unless they like. Nobody makes them drink."

"Yes, they are virtually made to drink by constant temptation. The liquor is sold out in such small doses, in such convenient places, and for such trifling sums, that those poor creatures who are inclined to drunken-

ness are solicited to their ruin every time they go out of doors. This does not give them a fair chance. It ought not to be any man's interest that they should get drunk."

"But it is perfectly lawful to distil spirits," said Amabel, "and perfectly lawful to keep those places for selling it in. If you — if you could persuade all who do either to give it up, others would instantly start forward in their room, and why are these more than other people to be above the law?"

Something almost piteous in the tone of her voice appeared to give it a penetrative quality. Amias was startled, and felt anew what a different thing it was to hold certain opinions in mere theory, and to hold them as against the wishes or feelings of one beloved.

Disturbed almost to the point of wretchedness, he walked awhile in silence beside her. For a few unworthy moments it hardly seemed worth while to live and not be in harmony with her wishes. Love, and even affection, is so extravagant, that there can be no fanatic or even enthusiast living who has not gone through this phase of misery.

Amias said at last, "People are seldom able to soar very high above what is expected of them. It is a fatal thing, therefore, not to be able to believe of any man, of any body of men, that they are incapable of living above the laws. I am quite certain that there are thousands of men in our own country at the present time, who, if once convinced that they were doing wrong, in that matter or any other, would give up everything rather than continue the wrong."

"Give up everything!" exclaimed Amabel, passing over the main point, and, girl-like, commenting on one small point in it. "Surely you do not think people ought never to have any strong drink at all?"

"No, we must have some."

"And how much do you think would be enough?"

"Well," said Amias, laughing, "since you ask me, I will say, at a guess, about a fiftieth part of what is now consumed."

Amabel was silent for a moment; then, not answering his last speech, she remarked, "And it always makes me uncomfortable to hear you talk of 'the liquor traffic.' I do not like names that sound vulgar."

"It makes her uncomfortable," thought Amias, "to hear *me* express myself in a way she calls vulgar!" He paused, and allowed himself silently to enjoy the pleasure this admission gave him. He was so happy, so lifted into the world of dreams, that for at least five minutes he took no notice of his fair companion—never looked her way.

Then they came to the point where they generally turned homeward. They both turned now, and it was towards each other. Her face was very slightly flushed, and a tear had half stolen down her cheek. "Amabel," he said, and unconsciously held out his hand. She put hers into it; but when she tried to withdraw it, having wiped away the stealing tear with her handkerchief, he still held it, and she saw him leaning towards her with eyes of yearning tenderness.

"What is the matter? What do you want to say?" she exclaimed, with evident discomfiture and her sweetest blush.

He answered, releasing her hand, "I only wanted—I only meant to thank you."

Amabel wondered what for, and was very glad when they met the remainder of their party, and the discourse turned on a soldier-crab that they had chased and captured, and were now carrying home, tied up in a blue veil.

CHAPTER XXI.

"FELIX," exclaimed Miss de Berenger the next morning, "the girls have been talking to me about a rural entertainment to be given on the race-course. Do you really mean to take them to it?"

"Oh yes, aunt; why not? It will be a kind of picnic for people like us — only the poor will be feasted. I shall like the girls to hear Amias speak."

"I suppose it will have something to do with temperance, then," said Sarah, in some disgust. "I hardly know how it is that there should always seem to be something so second-rate in that subject. One cannot be its advocate without making one's self ridiculous."

"But on this occasion," said Felix, "there will be several other ways open to your choice, if you want to make yourself ridiculous, aunt — jumping in sacks, for instance, donkey races, athletic sports, &c."

"A person of my age is never athletic enough to take part in such things," said Sarah, in all good faith. "I consider that it would be very unbecoming in me to attempt to please the lower classes thus, and to pretend that I like their amusements."

Felix, well as he knew his aunt, was surprised into silence by this speech, and she presently continued —

"You had better mind what you are about, and not tamper with temperance too much. Amabel is not at all happy. My dear uncle will think it very hard if her mind is poisoned in any way. Yes. She tells me Amias said yesterday that unless each one of the great brewers could be sure of having thirty thousand men always perfectly drunk for him — at their own expense — it would not be worth his while to brew at all."

"That sounds rather a wild statement," observed Felix, dryly. "I always distrust round numbers."

"I am sure she said so."

"I should have thought forty thousand was nearer the mark. But I don't wish to be captious."

"Should you really?" said Sarah. "Well, I have no doubt, if you could, you would like to do what the Royal Society wished to do to one of their comets (those scientific things are so curious and interesting). I read myself the other day in a lecture, that though a comet is often several hundred thousand miles long, yet such is its tenuity, that you could easily double up the whole substance of it and squeeze it into a pint pot — if you could only get hold of it. But science, you know, has never been able to get beyond the confines of this world on account of there being no atmosphere up there to breathe. So they can't do it."

"It would be better to say a quart pot," observed Felix; "a pint seems so very small."

"Well," said Sarah, "I am not sure about the exact size of the pot, but the principle is the same. And I have no doubt that you — and you too, Amias, though you seem to think this a mere joke (Amias had just entered the room) — you too would be quite happy if all the spirits in England could be concentrated and concentrated over and over again till it could be got into such a pot, and could then be solemnly sunk into the depths of the channel."

"That would be a very bad place, if you mean the *Irish* Channel," observed Amias, "because Ireland would certainly fish the pot up again."

"You take things too literally," said Sarah. "It is a great pity, Amias, to turn all the most philanthropic aspirations into mere jokes."

Perhaps Amias felt the truth of this observation, for he made no rejoinder, even when she had added —

"You would, of course, wish in such a case that the sister island should agree to fill a sister pot, and that the two should roll together, in peace and love, at the bottom of the ocean for evermore. Not that I speak as

a sympathizer, but my heart and mind, I am thankful to say, are large enough — yes — to show me what I should wish if I were one."

"You will go, aunt, of course?" said Felix.

"No, I shall not; it would be very inconsistent in me to fly in the face of my own people."

How little the joyous party setting forth to the race-course supposed that the trifling events of this drive were to be hoarded up in memory ever after! There were five miles between flowery hedges, then there was the scent of trodden grass, and of many a posy of pinks and southernwood worn in rustic button-holes; there were rows of carts and farmers' phaetons drawn up for the owners to sit in, while the horses were picketed at a distance. The very shape of the clouds that floated over cut themselves into memory as the background of a picture whose moving scenes could never be forgotten.

Mrs. Snaith had not heard much beforehand concerning this fête; it was only when she found that Mr. de Berenger was giving over the girls to her charge, and having the shawls arranged for them on a sloping grassy bank, close to what was called "the grand stand," that she knew there was anything more to listen to than a rustic band of wind-instruments.

And now here they were, close to the side of the grand stand, which was draped and bedizened with banners brought from the great house whose owners were the chief givers of the fête.

Then Mrs. Snaith understood that several gentlemen were going to speak; but she only saw the one who stood forward, Amias, and the moment he began, her motherly heart felt that Amabel, sitting beside her, was agitated, was blushing and in utter discomfiture.

It was so obvious, that she actually trembled lest some one who knew her darling should perceive it. Oh, could it be that her chief treasure had already taken leave of the peace of childhood, and was entering on the restless, useless, self-scrutinies of an unrequited affection? Mrs. Snaith thought of Amias as rather a great gentleman, quite out of her darling's reach,

and when the lovely face drooped a little in spite of its listening attitude, and the fair cheek covered itself with a soft carnation, the tender mother felt so keenly and painfully for the child's shy sensitiveness, that she could hardly look up herself. And yet she did, and just at the right moment; as people generally do when some one whom they know well is passing near.

A gentleman on horseback was coming up very leisurely towards the back of the grand stand. Mrs. Snaith's heart seemed for a moment to stand still as she saw him. Sir Samuel de Berenger! He was moving carefully and quietly among the closing groups of people. He was close; he passed right in front of Mrs. Snaith and her charge, but he did not appear to see them. He reined up his horse only a few feet in advance, among a group of farmers also on horseback, and only just far enough back to be unseen by Amias. Amabel had evidently been listening for him as well as for herself. Her mother saw it, and it only added to her discomfiture to be sure that he had his part also in that complicated state of feeling that made her look so abashed; it was for his sake as well as for her own that she had blushed. She had seen his approach, and what was he now listening to?

"And as for you," were the first words that reached his ears — "for there must be some such here — as for you who know the bitterness of a thraldom that you cannot escape, though it be ruining you body and soul — as for you whom the law has left, and leaves still, to the mercy of the lawless, the tender mercy of those who reach their greatness through your debasement, and build their houses out of your despair — you whose misery is the heaviest of all needless sorrows that weigh down the heart of the world — do not think you are come here to listen to any reproof. The movements of a pity that can dare to spend itself, sinking at the feet of your misfortune, is far too deep for words; but during your intervals of reprieve, when you think with ruth on the children whom you love, and the wife whom, with them, you are dragging down, consider — and relieve your hearts a little so — consider whether you have nothing

in your power that will aid to keep them out of the slough into which your feet have slipped. Have you nothing? Oh yes; you all have a certain influence, and some of you have — a vote.

"I have known many of the most unfortunate among your ranks who have used this influence well. I have heard miserable fathers entreat their children to abstain, and point to their own deplored example to give force to their words; but I seldom hear them go to the root of the matter, as I want to do now, when I say to you, never vote a brewer into parliament, however high his character may stand; never vote a brewer's son into parliament, however great his talents may be; never, whatever may be his politics, vote in any man who has the least interest in keeping up the profits of that hateful liquor traffic, which is the ruin of these two fairest islands of the world. Never give them your influence by so much even as silence — never, never. What can they give *you* that shall console for what they take? They stand between you and comfort, they stand between you and duty, they stand between you and honor, they stand between you and God.

"And we must be helpless, we shall be helpless, there can be no good legislature — nothing can ever be done to chain this monster, intemperance — so long as such a body of our legislators draw their revenues from it, and spend their strength in keeping it free."

Dick was sitting beside Delia, and so far from sharing Amabel's shyness and discomfort, these two were both highly amused in watching Sir Samuel, who, with a half-smile and an air of wonder, sat listening and keeping just out of sight of Amias. "Why doesn't he get a little forwarder?" whispered Dick. "I wish he would; and I wish I might see Amias start. But nothing worth mentioning ever does happen in this world. There's nothing for a fellow to see."

"And nothing to hear," echoed Delia. "Dick, I do hate temperance."

Still the fair face drooped, and the old great-uncle, on his horse, sat still and appeared to listen. Now and

again he cast a furtive glance about him, and was pleased to find no one in his field of vision that he knew; but now it was evident that Amias had finished his short speech, and that it was only an introductory one for what was to follow.

"There, there he is a-coming forward!" exclaimed a man close at hand; "that's the 'inspired cobbler.' Give him a cheer, boys; give him a cheer."

Some one was moving out as the other horsemen pressed a little forwarder, and Sir Samuel de Berenger, not betraying by his countenance either anger or discomfiture, passed just in front of his so-called granddaughters, lifted his hat as he did so, and smiled. At the same instant a fresh speaker came forward, and, clear over the heads of the people, rang the voice of Amias—

"Mr. Uzziah Dill will now address the assembly."

Yes, Mr. Uzziah Dill. Hannah Dill lifted up her eyes, and saw her husband. She looked on, and in that instant, during which her daunted heart held itself back from beating, she heard the never-to-be-forgotten sound of his foot as the lame man came slowly to the front. She saw the beautiful, pensive face turned with its side toward her, then a long ringing cheer of welcome broke forth all around her, and she heard a sharp cry close at hand: "Mrs. Snaith — Mamsey dear! Oh, don't! don't!"

What was the meaning of this?

She knew she was falling forward; her face seemed almost on her knees, and her children were powerless to hold her up. She could not lift herself, and her husband's voice, even at that pass, had power over her. She heard its high, sweet tones, and despaired; then came a suffocating sense of breathlessness, and then oblivion.

People generally wake again from a dead faint in a state of repose. Mrs. Snaith was no exception to this rule. She opened her eyes, felt very cold, heard a certain unintelligible buzzing of voices about her, then regained her full senses. Everything settled down into

its place, and here were Amabel and Delia kneeling, one on each side of her. She was lying on the grass under a tent; Amabel was putting water on her forehead, and Delia was fanning her.

Several kindly women were about her. They told the girls not to look frightened; they spoke to her encouragingly. She could not at first answer, but she heard them telling her that a fainting fit was by no means an uncommon thing. It was the hot weather, they declared, which had overcome her — nothing more.

She was quite herself now — able to think. She was so close to the back of the grand stand that her poor husband's voice was faintly audible through the canvas folds of the tent. She seemed, during the next few minutes, to be more alive than she had ever been in her life before, and, under the pressure of imminent peril, to be able to make swift and thoughtful decisions. She presently sat up and asked for her bonnet.

"How do you feel, ma'am?" inquired a sympathizer.

"I fare almost as well as usual," she replied; "and that's a good thing, for it was agreed that I should go home to my master's rectory by the next train, to get ready for the family, that is to return the day after to-morrow."

She was very anxious that the strangers present should know that what she wanted to do was to carry out no new, but a prearranged plan.

"You are not well enough yet, Mrs. Snaith, dear," said Amabel. "You shall not go till you have had something to eat. And look! here is the luncheon-basket. The kind people next to us brought it in."

Something like despair clutched at the heart of the poor woman, but she knew she must yield. The strangers about her left the tent, and she and the girls took some luncheon. She felt better for it; but when Amabel said, "There's another train at night, Mrs. Snaith, dear; why not wait for that? — you still look very pale," she answered, "No, miss, I can't stay here; and I ought to leave by the half-past four train, if it's not gone, else I shall not be in till midnight. Only," she

added, looking at Amabel and Delia with yearning love, "when Mr. de Berenger went away among the temperance gentlemen, he told me not to leave you."

Dick, as might have been expected, had taken himself off.

"We shall go with you to the station, then," said Amabel, "and stay in the waiting-room."

This is what Mrs. Snaith wanted; and Amabel longed to get away from the speeches. She had heard more than enough already. Mrs. Snaith rose. It was a very short distance to the station. She walked between the two girls with a certain urgency, but when they reached the line it appeared that the train was gone. She knew it would be. It was long past the time for it. It had come in during her fainting fit.

The station was the last place that she meant to stay in. She took the girls to a little wayside inn, the only house near at hand. They were shown into a parlor upstairs, which overlooked the course, and there the poor mother spent an hour in gazing out to see what would happen. Her pallor, and the strange eagerness in her dark eyes, struck the girls; they felt that she was still unwell, and therefore were the more inclined to stay with her and watch over her; and the "bands of hope," moving about with banners, the freemasons parading with their ornaments, and the different schools seated in distinct groups, having tea and cake under the auspices of their teachers, sufficiently amused them. "There's the lame man speechifying to those unlucky drum and fife boys," exclaimed Delia. "How tired they must be of it all! Just when the cans of tea and the great trays of cake are ready. Oh, how I should hate that man if I were one of them!"

The mother shivered when she heard this. "How horrible that Delia should speak thus of her own father! and oh, what a hypocrite that father must be!" She felt her soul revolt at him. She could hide herself from him, but it was not perfectly impossible that he might come up with Mr. de Berenger and Amias, and hear the girls' names. She almost hated him herself when

she thought of such a possibility, and yet she felt that, if only that happened, there was nothing in it. But she should have three days of dreadful anxiety, for she should hear nothing till her darlings came back to the rectory. She should be hidden herself in the inn till he was gone. The publican had told her that all the holiday folk were to return at half-past seven, in an excursion train expressly provided for them. She hoped this would be before the De Berengers came back to the inn for their hired carriage. She herself was to start at eight, and she bent all her attention towards doing the best for that one evening, and thought she would leave the future to take care of itself.

The girls now, by her suggestion, ordered some tea. "Something," she said, "must be done for the good of the house." When it came up, she asked for a placard setting forth what were to be the entertainments of the day. She had passed several of these on park palings and on the grand stand, and had not cared to look at them.

The placard set forth that Mr. Dill, sometimes called the "inspired cobbler," was in that neighborhood, and had kindly promised to turn aside and deliver one of his thrilling addresses on the race-course; that it was hoped a good collection would be made, to pay his expenses on this gratifying occasion, when the *élite* of the neighborhood would be present, to countenance the innocent pleasures, as well as to provide good cheer for some of their poorer friends. The inspired cobbler, as the placard informed those whom it might concern, was on his way to Southampton; any contributions intended for his benefit might be forwarded by stamps or post-office order to an address which was carefully given, and the donors might rely on their being thankfully received and duly acknowledged.

"If I can only keep my darlings up here till he is gone, poor man," thought the wife, "there is the best of hope that we shall all clean escape him."

"Ah, here comes the excursion train!" exclaimed Delia. "Look, Amabel. What a crowd of people

running up! what bunches of heather! what baskets of flowers! How hot they all look! There are the drum and fife bands, and the lame man."

Mrs. Snaith sat absolutely still and listened. She was far enough from the window not to be seen from below.

"How those boys screech at their fifes!" said Amabel. "It almost splits my ears. There's Coz and the lame man helping them in. What a cram! Now the lame man gets in too."

"Gets in, miss?" exclaimed Mrs. Snaith. "Are you sure?"

"Yes. And now they are off, and there is our carriage."

Mrs. Snaith rose then, drew a long breath, and looked at Amabel.

"It's time for you to go down," she said. "Mr. de Berenger will be wondering what has become of you."

"Mamsey, how earnestly you look at me!" exclaimed Amabel.

"Well, we none of us know what may happen," said the poor mother. "Will you give me a kiss, my — dear."

Amabel kissed her almost carelessly. They were to meet in two days; why should she think anything of such a parting?

Mrs. Snaith preferred the same request to Delia, who hung for a moment about her neck with a certain attention of remark which could hardly be called presentiment, but yet that enabled her easily to recall this kiss ever after, and the look in her old nurse's eyes, and the beating of her heart as Delia leaned against her.

And then the two girls went down to join Mr. de Berenger and Amias, Mrs. Snaith sending a message down, "Her duty, and she would stay there till the right train came up, for it was much cooler in the public-house than in the station." And then she drew close to the window, and with a sinking heart saw her darlings put into the open carriage, and saw it set off, and saw them wave their hands to her, and saw them disappear among the trees and leave her.

"He's gone," she then thought; "he's away, poor man; and I did ought to feel easy, for I've escaped, and my dears have escaped. He's on his way to Southampton, as sure as can be. What is it, then, that make me so full of fears?"

She trembled and sat still on the bedside, holding her throbbing temples between her hands; but gradually, as the evening drew on, and the low lights gave even the little shrubs of heather their lengthy shadows, she grew stronger, and some time after sundown, when all was peace in the deserted little station, she came down and sat on the bench outside it to wait for the train. She was restless with a strange hopelessness, and though she kept assuring herself that her children were safe, she was shaken by a dread, an almost certainty, that she was breathing still the same air with that man who had once been her other self.

"Oh for the train!" she murmured; "oh to set forth, and have this over!"

It was very soon over. One man only was waiting in the bare little room behind; the window was open within a foot of her head, and he was leaning out. He coughed, and with a start of irrepressible terror, she turned round and faced him. All was lost. Uzziah Dill recognized his wife, and Hannah Dill her husband.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE husband and wife gazed at one another for a moment without speaking; both seemed to be subdued into stillness by wonder, and one added terror to this feeling.

As Uzziah did not speak, his poor wife felt the slender ghost of a hope that her husband might not be certain of her identity, and she turned as quietly as she could, and had risen and moved towards the station door, when he cried out after her sharply and loudly, "Hannah!"

She still advanced, taking no notice of him. She did not dare to make haste, but with a certain calmness of manner she passed out and walked slowly upon the grass, and went behind a bank among the heather. She was thinking whether she could throw herself down with any hope of hiding, when the fatal sound of the lame foot was behind her, and with a feeling of desolation indescribable, she walked on and on, just keeping out of Uzziah's reach, but only just. She knew not what to do, and all her senses were sharpened. It seemed that they had come to her aid; but she questioned them, and it was only to find that nothing could be done — nothing. A great white moon had just heaved itself up. She was keeping the lurid orange sunset well behind her, lest its light should show her face, but now the light was purer in front, and she turned down a little decline and still walked slowly on.

Oh the bitterness of that hour! She still walked on, and the lame man toiled after her, and said not a word. She had come into a desolate cart tract which was grassy, between the heath-covered banks that rose high on either side. What good to go on any more? All was lost.

He had power over her to prevent her escape. She had felt that it was no use to run wildly away, for she knew that in such a case he had but to call and cry out after her, and she must, she should, return. She gave up hope, and sat down on the bank, dropped her hands on her knees, and awaited him without looking up.

The low moon was full on her face; the west had faded, and all was cool and dim. When Uzziah saw her sit down, he stood still for a moment, as if not wishing to startle her; then he slowly advanced, wiping his forehead, for the exertion of the walk had been great to him, though she had been little more than two miles.

The place was perfectly desolate and still — a good way from that portion of the great common which had been set apart as a race-course, and far from any road or field or farm.

If Hannah Dill had meant to deny her identity to her husband (but it did not appear that she had), her act in retreating thus must have made denial useless. Uzziah Dill did not appear to intend entering on that question. He came near and sat down on the grassy bank, about two feet from her. Her silence, her evident despair, awed him, and he let her alone, as if he meant to wait till she should speak. And yet his whole soul was shaken by surprise. That if they met she would claim him, hang about him, and sorely interfere with what he called his evangelistic work, had been his fear ever since he had found himself at liberty. She had loved him deeply and faithfully; it had not entered into his calculations that such a state of things could cease.

He took out his handkerchief and again wiped his brow; then the urgent thought found utterance. "I'm afraid, my poor wife, you've acted very bad by me, else you wouldn't be so fearful of seeing my face."

She had taken the money, and concealed his children; she felt for the moment that this was "acting bad" by him. She did not repent, of course, but she had nothing to say for herself.

"If you've not been true to me —" he exclaimed

almost passionately, and then seemed to give himself a sudden check.

"True to you!" she answered, turning slowly towards him and quietly looking at him from head to foot. "I never gave it a thought once, all these years, that I had to be true to *you*, but I thank my God He has always helped me to be true to myself."

The astonishment with which Uzziah Dill heard these words came not merely to contradict every recollection he had of his wife, but to produce some few reflections on his own past conduct; yet he presently put these back, and in a characteristic fashion still pressed his point.

"We're all on us poor, vile sinners, and have nothing to boast of."

"Yes," she answered, "I see what you are at. Through the blessing of God it is that I'm able to hold up my head with the best of good wives, that are happy as I have never been. I have no goodness of my own before God, but I look to be respected by men, because it's my due; and I don't answer like this because you were my husband, but because, let him be high or low, I should answer so to any man."

And then she broke down and burst into heart-sick tears — remembered how she had seen her darlings drive away, and wrung her hands and sobbed. It was not from any sense of consolation in his words, but rather from revulsion of feeling, that she checked herself when he said, "Hannah, this is a very quiet hour, and I feel solemn and nearer to our heavenly Father for it. If I was to relate my experience to you and how God has dealt with me, it might be blessed to you, my poor wife, as it has been to some others; for though I may say with the Apostle Paul, 'With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you or of man's judgment —'"

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed the poor wife, interrupting him vehemently, and shuddering with repulsion. "You're never going to compare yourself, Uzziah, to the Apostle Paul?"

"Why not?" he answered humbly, but without hesitation. "I bless the Lord that I am a sinner saved by grace, and what else was St. Paul?"

She was so shocked at this speech that she broke forth into tears again, with "Oh, I'm a miserable creature! I can't bear it! This is worse — worse than the loss of my dears!"

"Hannah," he answered kindly, and with something like authority in his manner, "I know you've had misfortunes, and that I've been the cause of some. I know I've many times drank myself mad, and then abused you shameful, and I know (and for all you may think I did not care to hear it, I did care) I was truly sorry when Mr. Gordon told me you had lost your babes. I wish to speak like a Christian man, that I could not call up such love for them as a father ought to feel, but I was sorry for you. I know right well that, when you buried them, it was a very bitter parting to you. Now, don't rend yourself so with sobbing; let the past be, and, with the blessing of God, let us live together in a better union for the future; and," he added, like a man who had never known any keen affection all his life, "it's a sad thing you should lament over them still. Forget them — they're well off; and they were but little ones." He took off his hat when he said "they're well off," and looked up reverently.

Though his speech had been so cold it was an advance on the past. Hannah Dill acknowledged its moderation, saw some contrition in it, and felt its truth; but the real parting had been so recent, and so different from what he supposed, that its bitterness overcame her again, and the tears ran down her cheeks. "Oh, my children, my dears, my only ones!" she sobbed out, "what is there for your mother to remember but you?"

And he thought they were dead. This was eventually to prove a great help to her, but at the moment it gave her a strange dread for them, an almost superstitious fear; as if, indeed, they *were* dead.

Her husband at this moment drew himself a little nearer to her as he sat on the bank, and she started

away with instinctive repulsion, whereupon, with a slightly offended air, he retreated to his former position, while she slowly, and without making any effort one way or the other, exhausted her emotion; and the moon, now dimmed by slightly veiling clouds, showed her black figure to her husband as she sat at the top of the bank, looking out over the wide expanse of blossoming heather, and sometimes clasping her hands as if she was in prayer. He also sat perfectly still, and in absolute silence. The balmy air that had been so sultry, was now cool and refreshing, a few stars were out, owls were skimming the tops of the heather, and some rabbits dancing and darting about on a dry green knoll. It was long before he spoke, and then it was with suddenness and decision.

"Well, Hannah, it's past eleven o'clock. We had better go to the inn, my dear."

An unwonted termination this, "my dear."

"Do as you please," she answered. "But, Uzziah, we are not going together."

"Not together?" he exclaimed. "You've lost that money over the shoe business, and you've hid yourself from me, and never wrote to me once for years; and I've met you and not said one word; and if you'd have come back and done your duty by me, I never would have done, the Lord helping me, — I never would have reproached you at all, but taken you back and made the best of you, as I believe is right; and now, Hannah —"

"Yes, and now," she repeated, "I tell *you* that I forgive the past. And this is true, and so I'll say it, that if I chose this moment to set off and get clean away from you, I could, as you know well; and if you won't give me time to think out my miserable duty, and consider whether I may not truly have the blessed lot of leaving you, or whether I must stay because God wills it, why, I'll take the thing into my own hands. I'll get away from you this night, and risk the repenting of it afterwards."

He sat silent for several minutes; then he answered, almost with gentleness, "Your words cut me very sharp,

Hannah; but I don't see what I have to answer before either God or you, but that I forgive them."

Hannah Dill here felt an instinctive consciousness of a change. When she moved a very little further off, it was not from any fear lest he should strike her. And she did not strive to hide her feeling of repulsion towards him when she replied, "I fare to think you cannot know, Uzziah, that I had the reading of that letter you sent through Jacob from your prison to Rosa Stock."

"Rosa Stock?" he repeated, faintly. "That was a long time ago."

"Not so long but what I have got a copy of the letter."

"I loved that woman," he exclaimed, passionately. "I had been her ruin, but she never seemed to think of that; and she had been my ruin, but that did not seem to make it right I should leave her without any comfort from me." Then his voice sank, and he went on, "Oh, I have been a miserable sinner!"

"Ay," answered his wife, with pitiless coldness; "but there's many a miserable sinner that's no hypocrite. It's because you're such a hypocrite that I fare to shiver so while you're near me. I got your letter to me after I had the money, and you'd heard of it, and I've got every word of it cut deep into my heart. You never asked whether *my* child was born, nor how *I* had fared after you turned me out of doors; but you wrote to say (God forgive you!) that you was a reformed character, and you wanted me to keep myself right for your sake."

"Ay, I was a hypocrite," he answered — "I was." He flung up his hands as he spoke, and she shrank hastily from him; but he clasped them upon his forehead and groaned, "Did you think I would *strike* you, Hannah?" he exclaimed, as if such a thought on his part was a most unnatural and cruel one.

She was silent.

"You have no cause to be afraid of me," he continued; "and now I see how it is that I cannot make the sweet offers of the Gospel to you as I can to others. It's because I have been so bad to you. My poor wife, I humbly ask your pardon!"

"No, it's because you make such high talk of religion," she replied, "that I feel as I could not bear with you. It fared to shock me so, to see you standing up — you that used to get so drunk — and preach to better folks that they were not to drink at all. It fares to turn my blood cold to hear you talk now of doing folks good with your religious experience, and how the blessed God deals with you, when the last I knew of you showed that, if you dealt with aught out of this world, it must have been with the evil one."

"Hannah, do you ever read the Bible?"

"Yes, I read it every day, and pray to God that I may understand it, and live by it."

"There's a thief you read of there that mocked at our Lord while he hung a-dying. He got forgiveness, didn't he?"

"Ay, but he died, Uzziah."

"But, if he had lived, do you think he would have gone back to his wickedness?"

"No, I don't."

"But you think there's no forgiveness for a wretched thief now; you think God cannot forgive a miserable drunkard now?"

"No, I don't think that, my poor husband; God forbid!"

"You think it possible that the blessed God might forgive — even me?"

"Yes, I do."

"But what if He did, Hannah? How should I order myself, if my sins were forgiven?"

"I expect you'd be very humble and very broken-hearted, and quiet about it."

"And not tell other poor wretches that were in the same misery and bondage that there was forgiveness for them too; that Jesus Christ could save them too, and would save them, if they would have Him?"

It was past midnight now, and this last appeal, which had been meant to be so comforting and so convincing, was too much for poor Hannah Dill. "O God, forgive me, if I want to do amiss!" she cried, and gave way to

an agony of tears. "It does seem as if I couldn't stop with you — I couldn't — I couldn't."

"Well, then," he answered, and rose and took off his hat, "let us pray."

She looked at him, and trembled; but she sat still, and the lame man knelt down. His wife could but just make out his figure, for a small dark cloud had come over the moon. She saw that he lifted up his hand, and then she, trembling yet, listened, and he began to pray, beginning with the beautiful and pathetic collect —

"O God, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright; grant to us such strength and protection, as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

And then, after a pause, he went on — the sometime drunken cobbler, the hypocritical convict, and bigamist, went on, with all reverence and solemnity. "It is a strange thing, good Lord, that we have to say to Thee. We are a miserable wife and husband that did not wish to meet — neither of us — and that was, maybe, wrong in Thy sight. I did try to find her at first, good Lord, and when I could not, I thought Thou hadst answered me, and I might serve Thee as a man free from her. I could live on so little, and her money I willingly gave up. And how could she follow me, often in hardship and hunger, when I go to speak well of Thee and Thy loving-kindness?

"And she, good Lord, she has lost that love she had for me, and that I did not care for, and she would fain go her ways. Shall I let her go, Lord — may I let her go in peace? — for Thou seest it is left to Thee. We met by Thy will, and we durstn't part without Thy blessing. Oh, give us that, and give it now!

"So many times thou hast answered me, but since the day when my sins were forgiven, I have never been in such a strait as I am now, and I want to talk with Thee of her side of this matter. Look on her. How hard it seems to come back! Ay, it would be a vast

sight harder still, if she could know all. Thou knowest all; I poured it out to Thee. It was a base thing to put into words. Maybe it went nigh to break Thy heart when Thou wert here, that men should have such deeds to confess. Maybe Thou knowest what it is to rue, even in Thy Father's bosom, the ways and the wants of us that are to Thee so near of kin. O Lord Christ Jesus, that we Thy brothers may be no more a disgrace to Thee, pray to Thy Father to make us pure, for Thy sake.

"I beseech Thee, be content to have the guiding of us, for we cannot guide ourselves. We have great searchings of heart, but come Thou and sit between us in this desolate place. Thou knowest what we want, Thy blessing on our parting in peace. But if we may not part thus, Thy blessing that we may live together in peace. Give it, O most pitiful Master, and give it by the dawning of the day!"

When he had got thus far, the lame man arose and went a little further, and again knelt down, holding up his hands, and still praying aloud, but far enough off to plead with God inaudibly, as far as his one human listener was concerned; and Hannah Dill felt then a little comfort in her misery: he was not praying for effect, and that she might hear him — at least, he was not a hypocrite here.

The moon came out — she was near her southing — and as she went down, Hannah Dill saw her husband's face, and knew that it was changed. A soft waft of summer air came about her now and again, dropping as if from the stars; her husband's voice came upon it, and died as it fell, and that was changed; no such tones in it had reached her ears of old. It went on and on, and still it went on. At first it had been almost a cry, a low, pleading cry; but afterwards, as she recalled the beginning, she wondered at its gradual change. No words to reach her, but yet now it was calm, and almost satisfied. This long prayer was more awful to her, in the solemn night, than any of his speeches had been.

It frightened and subdued her, but she would not speak, for while he was so occupied, she was left to herself. She leaned her elbows on her knees and propped her face on her hands — her poor face, stained with tears, and pale with long distress — but just as her lulled emotion and fatigue between them had brought her such quietness as might have been succeeded by a doze, the distant voice stopped, and she, missing its monotonous murmur, started and was distressfully awake again. It might be about three o'clock, she thought; the moon was gone, and though two or three stars were quivering in the sky, the restfulness of night was almost over. The hills, she thought, had taken rather a clearer outline towards the east, and there was more air stirring over the heads of the heather.

She saw her husband rise, and a thrill of joy ran through her veins when she observed that he did not mean to approach her. She made out, in the dimness that comes just before dawn, that he went slowly to a little rise where the heather was thickest, and that he laid himself down in it. She knew he was a heavy sleeper, and that in a few minutes he would sleep. Was she not alone? Could she not now steal away from him? No. Before the thought was fully formed, she knew she could not. The sleeping man's prayer had power over her; it seemed to wake yet while he slept. And now that she could feel herself retired from all human eyes, she also arose and kneeled down, and spread out her hands as if she would lay her case before the Lord.

Not a word to say, not one word; but a thought in her mind like this: "It is not because I cannot make my statement clear, that God does not see and pity my case; let my God look upon me and decide, for whatever it is to be, I consent." A long time silent thus, even till the grass turned green about her, and the birds began to wake — even till the first streak of gold was lying along the brink of the hill, and till the utter peacefulness of the new dawn seemed to make her aware that in her own mind was also dawning a resignation that

was almost like peace. If all joy was gone, and all comfort given up, at least they had been stolen away gently, and, as it were, almost with her own consent. "Thou knowest that *I* cannot bear it," she said quietly. "Oh, bear it for me; take my burden on Thyself!"

And almost as she spoke, she felt aware that she had been helped — that all should be right, and was right. Then she too rose from her knees, and heard the lame man approaching; she sat down on the bank, and he sat beside her.

All the east was taking on its waxing flush. She and her husband looked at it together as they sat side by side. She sighed twice; its solemn splendor was so great, and her heart had sunk so low, she could hardly bear to look at it, but at last he spoke.

"Well, Hannah," he said, "there's words to be spoke now; and, my poor wife, it's right you should begin."

"Ay," she answered, faltering, and faint from long emotion and want of rest, "I've a right to say that you must tell me what has become of Rosa, and her babe."

"Rosa Stock?" he replied, solemnly. "She dead, Hannah — dead this seven years; and her babe's dead too."

Naturally this information made a difference. The poor wife sighed again. "But I cannot live with him," she thought, "if I'm to be always living in a lie. — You said to God in the night," she went on, "that I didn't know all."

"It's true, Hannah," he replied.

"And no more can you know all," she replied. "What's done, was done for the best. As for me, I want to know no more. I'll ask no questions about anything, nor never reproach you; and these words are my vow and bond that I won't. But, in return, you're never to ask me — never — how I came to lose the money, and —"

She paused so long, that he at last said, "If it's clean gone, and nothing I could do could by possibility get it back, promise I do."

"And my children," she began, melting again into heart-sick tears. "If I go along with you, you must promise me, on your solemn word before God this hour, that you'll never, never mention them to me; never, never let their names pass your lips to me more."

He turned to her with a look of surprise. She was quietly wiping away her tears. He would have liked to comfort her; he even began to reason with her. "I should have thought it might be a comfort to you, to talk about their pretty ways, and their deaths likewise."

"It is not," she answered. "I fare to believe that it's my duty to stay with you, if you'll consider over this one thing that I demand so solemnly, and promise it with all your heart; but if you won't do that, then let me go my ways."

After a short pause, he answered, "Hannah, I promise." And then she gave him her hand, and he helped her to rise. And they walked together in the early sunshine, to get the refreshment they sorely needed, at the little inn. Not a word or a look passed between them; one went with silent exultation, and the other with silent tears.

CHAPTER XXIII.

UZZIAH DILL and his wife were both sorely fatigued when, in the rosy flush of a summer morning, they reached the little inn. Its windows were not yet opened, and they sat on a bench outside, under a thickly branched maple tree. Uzziah Dill was able to observe and reflect. He noticed the neatness and cleanliness of his wife's array. She was one of those women who are far more attractive in early middle life than in youth. The lanky, gaunt figure had a fuller and more gracious outline now; the sometime thin features and great, hungering eyes were softer. It was a long time since any man had struck her, or insulted her, or scowled at her, and even after that night of misery, her expression of countenance bore witness to this fact. She was languid, very weary, and very full of sorrow, but her fear of him, as he had sense to see, was no fear of a blow.

He thought she would soon "come round." She had loved him when he had ill-treated her; surely her very jealousy was a proof that, whatever she might say, she had not utterly ceased to love him even now. And he meant to be so good to her, so — yes, even so loving to her. He had not wished to meet with her — very far from it — but here she was, and he found himself exulting.

There was a pump close at hand, and some sparkling, clear water lying under it, in a wooden trough. Hannah Dill went to it, and, taking off her bonnet, bathed her aching eyes and brow. He watched her; approved in his very heart the semi-methodistic plainness of her dress; saw her twist up her long hair with

interest, put on her bonnet and shawl again, and come slowly back.

He thought he would say something encouraging and affectionate to her. He would let her know that she had happiness before her, and not misery; but when she came and sat down near him again, her gentle patience, her hopeless eyes, that did not look at him, seemed to steal his words out of his mouth.

"Hannah," was all he managed to say, "they are astir in the inn now; I'd better go in and tell them to get us some breakfast."

He seemed to wait her reply, and she said listlessly, "As you will."

It had pleased God already to discipline his base nature; he had endured great fear, had found himself to be vile. It had seemed to himself, as he lay once in the prison in solitary confinement, on account of his bad language and coarse insubordination, it had seemed all on a sudden as if some evil spirit drew near him in the dark and took his sins by armsful and heaped them over him, and he saw them as if they had bodily substance, and there were so many that they crushed him down. His first sensation was more astonishment than even fear. All these hateful things, excepting one or two that always haunted him, had seemed to be dead and gone, and now they were alive; not put away, but his, swarming about him, part of himself. He struggled, he trembled, he cried out. Then he thought he would act a more manful part; he tried to fling them off, he would not be so cowed. What could he do by way of occupation? He would recall all the songs he had been used to sing, and sing them now. So he wiped his forehead and began. But lo, it was a quavering, craven voice that sang; it moaned over the wicked words, it sank and choked over the impure ones. There was no comfort here. But something he must and would do, or this stifling weight on his soul would kill him. It was not that he repented, it was hardly remorse that he felt; it was the mere presence always over and about him of this load of wickedness. that he knew to be his

own wickedness, that daunted him and made him so wretched. Well, he would say over so many of his school lessons as he could remember, he would set himself sums in his own mind, he would go over the multiplication table.

The chaplain found him one day at this weary work, trying to find some occupation and some thoughts to stand between him and his crimes. His sleep had departed, his mind was clouded, he was willing for once to speak, and seemed to think that no man had ever suffered so before. "I can't get them away!" he exclaimed, tearing at his breast. "How should I?—they are myself. I shall die if they press me down so."

The chaplain had always felt a sort of horror of him, he had been such a hypocrite, he had done so much to corrupt some of the other prisoners. He looked at him attentively, supposing that this was only some new piece of hypocrisy.

"The Almighty has been hard upon me," he continued; "I am cast into hell before my death."

"No," answered the chaplain. "The Almighty has been merciful to you, and given you still your life to repent in."

"I have tried to repent, and I cannot. How should I get to repent?" he answered.

"God, and God only, can give true repentance. You must humbly ask Him to give it to you." And then he looked doubtfully at the prisoner, who seemed so restless and so defiant, and so enraged. "Like a wild bull in a net," he thought within himself.

"I've tried as hard as ever I can to do what you call repent," continued the prisoner. "But even if I could be sorry all my days, here they are, these sins; I could not get away from them."

"No," answered the chaplain; "but you have leave to take them and lay them at the foot of the cross, the cross of Christ."

The prisoner answered, but not irreverently, only with the dulness of despair, "He would have nothing to do with such as I am. And why should He?"

"Why, indeed!" answered the chaplain; "that is more than we know. But if you can believe that God gave Him, and that He was willing to be given, to take away the sins of the world, you know enough."

"Well, I've heard say so all my life," said the prisoner, "but that don't seem to bring me any help. I'm down, that's what I am — sunk in the pit — and I don't see any hope, nor ease, nor daylight, nor way of getting out."

"And I cannot say so much as 'God help you,'" answered the chaplain; "for God offers you help only in that one way, and if you will not have it, there is no help for you in heaven or earth."

"I've done a good many black deeds," reasoned the prisoner, "as the good Lord knows better than you do. If I could only get them down and trample them under my feet, I would kneel then and cry for mercy."

"I tell you that trying to trample down your crimes is of no use. Your character is a part of yourself; you cannot get away from it, nor do away with them; but the Saviour of mankind, if you will go to Him, will not only forgive, but will release you and relieve you of them, and take them on Himself."

"Then let Him," cried the prisoner, flinging himself on the ground — "let Him!" he cried with vehemence, and almost with rage. "Let the good Lord have mercy on my miserable soul! I'm spent with misery, I can do nothing in the world; but if He did die to save such black sinners, and if He can bear with those that cannot even bear with themselves, and can get them free of their sins, and make men of them again, He never had a better chance than He has now. I say it humbly to Him, let the good Lord try His hand on *me*."

In the choking accents both of rage and despair, Uzziah Dill cried out thus as he lay grovelling on the ground, and the young chaplain, starting up, looked at him with something like fear. The coarse nature and the ungoverned passions of the man had been taken hold of by a power too strong for him to cope with, but his own words rang in his ears now, and he lay upon the floor silently, as if a great awe was upon him.

The chaplain had nothing to say. A great many convicts had professed repentance, and most of them on release had fallen away. He was about to kneel and offer prayer, when the convict sat up, and said in a scared voice, as if for the first time conscious of that great Presence in which we always dwell, "Those I shouted up were impudent words. I had no call to shout at all," he continued, looking round. "But I say again, the Lord, for Christ's sake, have mercy on my sinful soul!" Then — strange comment indeed on his own prayer — "Now," he continued, still with that look of awe, "now I've played my last card."

The chaplain, feeling shocked both at the wicked fellow's prayer and the violent way in which he had acted, was soon out of his cell. Uzziah Dill was asleep the next time he came to visit him, and the second time was so peaceful and quiet, as to appear more than ever a hypocrite to those about him; but he used no bad language, and was never insubordinate any more.

So, it had pleased God already to discipline his coarse nature. He had been cast into prison for his crimes, and there they had been shown to him as if pointed at by a finger from above; and then they had fallen from him, had been sunk, as it were, in the depths of the sea. And after that had come the discipline of contempt and long suspicion. These lasted almost till the time of his release — during all those years when he had been earnestly trying to improve himself, his intellect and all his powers becoming stronger through long protection from the constant tempting to drink, which had been too much for his feeble nature and weak constitution.

And now another discipline was preparing for him, woven out of circumstances, and from one of the commonest contradictions that prevail in this contrary world.

He was not so obtuse that he did not perceive his wife's misery, her almost loathing of him. The love she had borne him and which he had never cared for, and long forgotten, flashed back on his remembrance now. He seemed to have a right to it NOW, and every

half-hour assured him that to be a good and loving husband to her would be an easy task NOW. And he could not have it.

If God had forgiven him, why could not she? He longed to assure her how different he now was, but his tongue was tied; she would not believe him. He remembered with a pang the many good women that had kindly and even proudly entertained him after his temperance lectures, "for his works' sake;" but the deep humility of dawning love made him all too certain that they did not know him as his wife did, they did not know his past.

They ate and they drank together almost in silence; then, to the astonishment of Hannah Dill, her husband talked humbly and most piously to the landlady while she cleared away. It was very early; and if she and her family were not in the usual habit of having family prayers, he would be very glad to conduct it for them, for, with apologetic gentleness, "it was indeed so bright and early, that no interruption of business was likely."

The landlady took the proposal well. The poor wife felt that she could hardly bear to hear him "show off" before her; but when Uzziah Dill was told that the inn kitchen was ready for him, and that, beside the household, two carriers, "very quiet men," would be glad to join, he said, so as not to be overheard, "Hannah, I seem to feel as you would liefer stay here, and I've nothing to say against it."

"No, Uzziah," she answered, instantly changing her mind, "I fare to think I had better go in;" and she sighed and followed him.

The poor ex-convict had a ready tongue, and he already knew his one Book well. He read a psalm, and made a few devout comments on it. His wife, in spite of herself, thought his remarks almost as scholarly and fine as Mr. de Berenger's; and when he began to pray, and faltered a good deal for all his earnestness, she knew as well as if she had been told, that it was her presence which took away his self-possession. He desired her approval; he wondered what she would think.

So, when they were alone in the little parlor — for the parliamentary train was not to pass till noon — she said to him, "Uzziah, it is but right I should tell you I'll never breathe to any soul your having been in prison. I'll not interfere with your speeches in that way."

"Thank you heartily," he answered; "but, Hannah, where I think it will do good to tell it, I often have told it myself."

"Do good?" she exclaimed. "How should it do good? Who is to listen if you tell such a thing as that?"

"Many a drunkard will listen," he answered, "if he finds that, through the drink, I have been in a worse case than he has. It's all the drink, Hannah, that does for us. I never wished to do a thing against the law till I was under the temptation of it. When I had once done wrong, I sneaked and was wishful to do better and keep right till I was half drunk again; then the old wicked daring came, and made a wild beast of me. It gave me courage and cunning, too. I saw how to do the bad thing, when my pulse was all alive with that stimulus. But it was my natural way, before I was a converted man, to be a hypocrite. So I must watch most against that sin, and not make out that I've always had a good character."

"Then how do you get a living? Who employs you?" she inquired.

"Well, first place, I'm never called an impostor, for I acknowledge that I'm low down. In general, after I've spoke, there's a little collection made for me; and I have my tools, so, if a brother or sister has any shoes to mend, I mend them. Though I say it, they're well done, and through that I often get more custom. Or, so long as I seem to be doing any good in a town, I take a little journeyman's work, and so, what with one thing and another, I bless the Lord I have not wanted yet."

If there was anything ludicrous in this speech, that was not the quality in it which most struck his wife.

"You live from hand to mouth, then?" she observed.

"I did ought to do," he answered; "but I went to Mr. Gordon to look after you, and he told me there was fifteen pound in hand, and that I was to have thirty pound a year so soon as I could claim it."

"Yes," she replied; "it were but right."

"Well, I took the fifteen, and it seemed as if I was distrusting the Lord, and I could not spend it, Hannah; let alone your uncle never meant his earnings to come into my grip. I have given three pound of it away to some of the Lord's poor, and to a man that I got to take the pledge, and here is the rest in my pocket. We shall go about so cheap, Hannah — sometimes in a smack, and sometimes in an excursion train or a carrier's cart. That thirty pound a year will keep you, with what little extra I can earn."

We? Then he expected to have her always with him!

"But why should you feel any call to go moving about?" she repeated.

"Because I'm a temperance lecturer. But I have not the impudence to offer myself to be paid by any society — none of them would employ a man that had not a good character. I do not preach. I seem to think you'll be glad to hear that."

"You're not a dissenter, Uzziah?"

"No; so I don't interfere with the work of the ministry. But I make the offer of the Gospel wherever I can privately, and I go and see poor folks in prisons and workhouses, when I can get leave." He paused, then added, with a sigh, "It cuts me very deep, Hannah, to see you look so miserable, and hardly seem to care about anything. If you knew more about this temperance question, and how drink is the one cause of the ruin of nineteen out of twenty that go to the bad —"

She interrupted. "I know all about temperance — all," she said, listlessly.

He looked surprised, then, as if her weary indifference goaded him into making a complaint, he continued —"And if you knew how pleased I am to find you

again, and how it cuts me to see that — well, I mean, you used to be fond of me, Hannah."

"Yes."

"And if I'd been so blest as to have found salvation then, and taken to sober ways, you'd have been a happy woman."

"Yes."

She sighed bitterly, as she uttered that one syllable of reply; she evidently could not rouse herself to care what he thought of her. He went to the window and looked out, trying to find something to say that would please her. The time was getting on, and he had certainly made no way at present. When he looked round she had slipped out of the room. She had resolved to ask for the bill and pay it herself, that, if any illusion was made to her having been there the evening before with young ladies, she might be the only person to hear it.

"I have no luggage, Uzziah," she said, when she returned; "and if you ask me why, I cannot tell you, nor which of the four towns I came from, that met here yesterday. But I have paid the reckoning, and I've money in my hand that will buy me clothes for a good while to come." She had, in fact, been paid her quarter's wages a few days previously.

Uzziah Dill seemed to understand that he was to ask no questions, or perhaps he perceived that it would only be a waste of words if he did; so he proceeded to show, as he thought, a great proof of confidence. He laid about two pounds on the table, in silver and copper, and took out a small parcel done up in brown paper. "That's the twelve pound, Hannah," he said, "and there's what money I have. You had better take charge of it, and I can ask you for what I want; I never spend a penny now that I need be ashamed you should know of. I've kept out enough to pay our two tickets."

She shrank from this mark of his trust in her. "I'm not used to carry so much about with me," she said faintly. "You'd better by half put it back again."

So he did, looking almost as spiritless as herself; and they walked slowly to the station.

And now began a new and very strange life for Hannah Dill. The third-class carriage was full of people, and her husband, with a kind of uncouth attempt at politeness, began to offer them temperance tracts. Some took them, others argued with him and made game of him. He showed what, to his wife, seemed an unnatural and distressing humility. It seemed not in the least to signify what they said of him or to him, if they would only take his tracts and promise to read them.

It was a very slow train, and Hannah Dill, in spite of herself, dozed; but her sleep was far from refreshing, and she started with a low cry of terror when her husband touched her and said they were to get out.

It was about four miles to the next station, and to that they were to walk and wait till late in the afternoon, when another train would come up and take them on. Uzziah Dill bought some food, and they went on together, he carrying it, and she holding her umbrella over her head, for the day was sultry. There was plenty of time before them, and the walk might have been delightful to a happier woman. They went through newly cut hay-fields and among bean-fields; they came to a little river full of floating water-lilies — it was spanned by a wooden bridge. Close to it was a small empty cart-shed, and in its shade they sat down to make their noon-day meal. After that the ex-convict, not able to repress his joy at his wife's presence, and his thankfulness for God's goodness, proposed to sing a hymn, and forthwith broke out into a well-known strain, full of exultation, joy, and praise.

Thunder had been muttering for some time. And with more than common suddenness, a cloud, coming over, burst in torrents of rain; while, just as the last verse was in course of conclusion, two young men dashed across the wooden bridge from the opposite field, and took shelter also in the shed.

"By Jove!" exclaimed one of them, taking off his

hat and sprinkling the dust with drops from its brim "They *are* going it."

He meant the elements. And just then a great green flash seemed to run all over them, and among them, and such a rattling, crashing peal of thunder with it, that the water in the little river shook with its vibrations.

"By Jove!" repeated the same young man, in an admiring and more respectful tone, as if he could not think of withholding his tribute to these elements, when they were so much in earnest about their business.

Then the usual thing followed. Uzziah Dill with humble civility, almost ludicrous, rose, and making his bow to the young men on the other side of the cart, received two nods in reply, while he said, "The gods of the heathen, gentlemen, are no good to swear by in a danger like this. I'll take leave to address a prayer to the true God, for we seem to be in the very midst of the muddle; and I have my dear wife with me, whose safety it's natural I should think of." Thereupon, pulling off his hat again, he held it before his face, and, turning away, murmured into it an inaudible prayer.

The two young men looked at each other, and Mrs. Dill could not forbear to glance at them. She was ashamed of her husband and for him, and yet ashamed of herself for being ashamed.

One of the young men was very tall and dark; he leaned on one of the cart-wheels and smiled, while he looked at the man praying. The other young man was small and fair; he sat on the shaft, and remained perfectly grave; he had a little mouth, which he slightly screwed up with an air of observant intelligence, that made him look especially foolish.

When a baby looks thus at a candle, we think the little face has an air of wisdom; but if a young man looks thus at an ordinary hay-cart, we are sure he must be an ass.

Uzziah Dill now turned round, and, after another tremendous clap of thunder, produced a bundle of leaflets, and was just about to make a civil offer of some to the gentlemen, when the tall young man — Lord Rob-

ert, in fact — burst into a good-natured laugh. "Why, Peep," he exclaimed, "this is out of the frying-pan into the fire! Put them up, my good man — put them up. This gentleman's pockets," indicating his companion, "are full of them already. They are temperance leaflets, I see."

Uzziah Dill, finding his incipient temperance lecture taken out of his mouth, looked foolish for a moment; but when little Peep said kindly, "Ye-es, I am much interested in the temperance cause," his countenance glowed with joy.

"Indeed, sir," he said respectfully. "Then, sir, I make bold to wish you God-speed with it. I'm only a poor cobbler," he continued, after giving little Peep an unreasonable time to reply in, if he had been so minded, "but I count it a great honor to be able to help such a blessed cause, if it's ever so little."

"Ye-es," said little Peep, and slowly added, taking time to cogitate between every two or three words, "I wish — there was no — strong drink."

Thereupon Lord Bob, taking no notice at all of the cobbler, gave little Peep a dig in the ribs. "No strong drink? You are a pretty fellow," he exclaimed. "Call yourself a Briton, and talk of getting into parliament, and yet cry out, 'No strong drink!' How's the Government to go on without the revenue from it? Where will you get the money to pay your soldiers and sailors with?"

"I don't — know," said little Peep, looking as much perplexed as if he felt seriously concerned to produce the wherewithal then and there.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOW could there be a better opening for a palaver? It was pouring now with steady rain. Little Peep, seated on the shaft, looked much perplexed; Uzziah Dill sat on the shabby carpet-bag that held his tools; and Lord Bob, facing them both, leaned on the wheel of the cart, and, being very tall, looked right over it into little Peep's eyes. "There's patriotism!" he exclaimed. "Do you want the country to go to wrack? Don't you know, and don't you too, cobbler — I beg your pardon —"

"No offence, sir; that's my trade," Uzziah broke in. "Pray go on, sir."

"Well, don't you know, then, that our soldiers and sailors are almost entirely paid out of the revenue that comes from the excise duties?"

"Well, sir," Uzziah presently said, after giving little Peep time to reply, if he chose, "if I am to answer, I'll say that drink costs the country very nigh as much as it pays it. Look at all our criminal courts, what they cost — our judges, our prisons, with all their officers and servants, and the chaplains, and the feeding of the prisoners, and their clothes. Then look at our police force — their wages, and clothes, and all the rest of it, sir. And then consider that, nineteen-twentieths of all the crime being caused by drink, that proportion of the expense would be saved if we were sober."

Even little Peep was startled here. "Ye-es," he said, with what for him was wonderful promptitude; "but nineteen-twentieths is such — a — such a jolly lot to write off."

"Off the crimes, sir, did you mean, or the money?"

"Why, it's the money we want, *and are trying—to scrape together.*"

"Well, sir," cried the cobbler, "I'm sure I'm willing to meet you half-way. We'll say nine-tenths of the expense is saved; we have nineteen-twentieths less crime, and the country saves nine-tenths of the expense, which you have towards the army and navy."

"That's fair," said little Peep.

"And my nineteen-twentieths, sir, includes not only the convictions for crimes done when a man is in drink, but those committed by habitual drunkards, even though they be then sober; men, in short, that have got their wills made weak by drink, and their consciences clouded."

"You have got up the subject, cobbler, I see," observed Lord Robert.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, but granting all you say (for the sake of argument, merely), the sum saved would not half pay."

"I was afraid it wouldn't," said little Peep, screwing up his mouth and shaking his head.

"No, sir; but then, if we had no drunkards, we should have hardly any paupers. Only think what they cost the country. We should save a sight of money there."

"You take a good deal for granted."

"But not too much, sir. I take for granted that, thank God, people have their feelings. There are thousands of poor old folks in the workhouses that have children who'd scorn to leave them there, but that they're almost beggars themselves, along with their families, because they are such slaves to the drink. There are thousands upon thousands of children there as well, because they've lost father, and often mother too, through the drink."

Little Peep here began to look a trifle happier. He glanced at Lord Robert, as if the matter was in his hands, and on his fiat depended the payment of her Majesty's forces. He was in the habit of taking things

very much to heart; besides, he had a nasty cough. He must not leave the cow-shed, therefore, while it rained, and while he stayed he would, of course, talk to the cobbler. For these reasons, therefore, and not because he cared about the matter in hand, Lord Bob gave himself an air of conviction, and looked cheerful.

"Come," he said, "I think we're getting on. Besides, you may remember that, with all our sobriety, we shall still derive some revenue — suppose we say one-twentieth — from the excise on strong drink. You can add that."

"And what about the duties on tobacco? Many people sa-ay you're not to smoke," said little Peep.

"It can only be the most hardened villains who say that. Drinking and smoking have nothing really to do with one another. In fact, some of the most sober nations smoke most," replied Lord Robert, laughing.

"My doctor always tells me to smoke — in moderation," said little Peep.

"And if you drink toast and water with your pipe, or drink nothing at all, sir, where is the harm of it?" said Uzziah. "Anyhow," he continued, in a burst of generosity, "I should wish the government to keep that branch of the revenue. *We* have no call to interfere with it; for ours is the temperance cause, and nothing else."

"Then, if I'm to have all that," said little Peep, cogitating, "won't it be almost enough? or shall we all have to be taxed much more than — than we are now, you know?"

"Even if we are, sir, think how much richer we shall be. We shall hardly feel it. We shall be richer by nineteen-twentieths of all those millions that we are now paying for drink, and by what we earn in regular wages, and by most of the paupers being at home with their parents and with their children. Some taxes will be taken off, and others will be put on."

"And so you think we shall do?"

"I pray God for a chance of trying, sir."

"So do I," answered little Peep.

"I take my leave of you, gentlemen," then said the

cobbler. "And if you'll put up your umbrella, my dear, it's about time we stepped over to the station."

Mrs. Dill rose, and, to her great shame, saw each of the gentlemen drop money into Uzziah's hand, and saw him receive it, and put it in his pocket. They knew him better than she did, it appeared.

"Thank you, gentlemen," he said. "To give this to me is about the same thing as to give it to the cause; for I live for the cause, in my humble way."

He had not gone many yards, following closely on his wife's heels, when Lord Bob came striding after him. "I say, cobbler," he cried, "you're no fool—I can see that."

"You're very good, sir," answered Uzziah. "Such headpiece as I have is not fuddled with drink, anyhow. I am a sober man now, through the goodness of the Lord."

"Well, look here, there was a little flaw in those fine calculations of yours, which I did not wish my poor friend to see. You make out that, if all the people became sober, they would save—how many millions a year is it? Well, I forget; but suppose it saved, whose pockets is it in?"

"Why, in the people's pockets, sir."

"Exactly so, and not in the pocket of the Government. How do you propose to conjure it there?"

Now, Lord Bob, being very tall, and the rain pouring down, dropped a good deal from the brim of his hat and splashed on Uzziah's nose as he looked up to answer.

"It seems to me, sir," he said, both men walking on at a smart pace, "that there may be a flaw in *your* calculations. When God puts it into the minds of a good many people that a certain thing they've been in the habit of doing—as I may say with a clear conscience—is a wrong thing to do, that is a kind of prophecy that the thing, sooner or later, is going to be done away with by them; just as the slave trade was, you know, sir, and then slavery. We that think about it have got, so to speak, such a prophecy, and that you should not leave out of your calculation. This great drink traffic is certain sure going to be done away with; we don't know when, and we don't know how."

"Going to be given up!" exclaimed Lord Robert, laughing.

"Yes, sir. There has been a great deal of talk this forty years about what a sad thing it was to drink, but not half enough about what a sad thing it was to distil the drink, and sell out the drink. A vast many folks have found out this lately. I heard a gentleman lecture on it only yesterday. His name was Mr. Amias de Berenger."

Lord Robert heard this name with great amusement; but it did not suit him to let the cobbler know that he was intimate with Mr. Amias de Berenger. He smiled. "And so this Mr. de Berenger and you temperance folks generally have got a kind of supernatural instinct in you (which you call a prophecy), and it tells you that every man concerned in the liquor traffic is going to be ruined?" Then, after a short pause, his native gentlemanhood coming to his aid, he added, "And all the drunkards reclaimed, while at the same time we may leave Providence to look after the revenue?"

"I don't exactly know about that, sir," answered Uzziah, who felt himself rather at fault there.

"It seems to me that Parliament will have enough to do," continued Lord Robert, half bantering him. "It has first to stop the liquor traffic; secondly, to compensate the whole body of publicans; and, thirdly, to find money for the payment of the forces."

"Well, sir, Parliament had enough to do — and did it — when it had to make folks believe that slavery was not to be borne with, and then to compensate the slave-owners. But the world has got on since that, and it may be through that. And how do you know that the heads of the liquor traffic will not be the first to show how this thing is to be done?"

"I am no prophet, cobbler; but I think I know better than that."

"Well, sir, and I am no prophet; but if you are sure Parliament will pass no bills to stop the traffic, and no other way can be thought of, why, we have no call to consider how the forces are to be paid. But I have noticed," continued the cobbler, "a strange way there

is with people, as if they thought human creatures, when they were added together, were not as good as every one of the same lot is when he stands by himself. Now, why are you and five hundred other gentlemen not to be willing to do what you yourself are willing to do, sir, for your fellow-creatures?"

Then, as Lord Robert strode beside the limping cobbler, he fell into a short cogitation, keeping an amused expression of surprise on his pleasant face, and not in the least attending to Uzziah Dill, who was carefully attempting to explain that, in using the word "good," he did not impute to men any works that had merit in themselves.

Lord Robert heard not a single word of this theological dissertation, but the cobbler was gratified by his silence, and surprised when he suddenly exclaimed, "How do you know that I myself am willing to do anything at all for the benefit of my fellow-creatures? Better ascertain that before you talk of the other five hundred."

"I leave it entirely to you, sir," said Uzziah, with a smile. "You know best; but I am not afraid."

"And you stick to it, that this thing is going to be done?"

"Oh yes, sir. I believe every man will soon have a good chance of being sober; that everything will soon be in favor of his keeping sober, instead of in favor of his getting drunk."

"In spite of the immense interests that stand in the way, and in spite of the determination of the people to have drink?"

"Yes, sir; but how it's to be done I know nothing about. It seems most likely that God will put it into the hearts of the people more and more to band together, to encourage one another, and help one another themselves to give drink up."

"Well, cobbler, I must go, and I will say this —"

"Sir?"

"You are the most downright, thorough-going, unreasonable, incorrigible fanatic I ever met with!"

So saying, and with a good-natured laugh, and another half-crown, Lord Robert strode back to the cow-shed as fast as his long legs would carry him. "Well," he said, arguing with himself as he went on, and smiling furtively, "of course there must be a grain of sense in the schemes and dreams of every fanatic, or how could his fanaticism spread? Does this, or does it not, seem more utopian than the putting away of slavery did in its day? Should I, or should I not, have thought the man such a fool if I had met with him before I was engaged to (well, she's a sweet creature, and I am a lucky dog) — engaged to Fanny? I shall have her fortune down; therefore, cobbler, you are right. I *have* a great willingness in my mind to do something for my fellow-creatures, if I can without inconvenience. No! Come! I am hard upon myself. I cancel those last words. The brewer's sweet little daughter deserves something more of me, considering the pains she takes to make a better fellow of me. Yes, he promised me her fortune down. What a philanthropic old boy he is! — his hand always in his pocket to help the poor. How would it look if, the next time he gave Fanny a good round sum for charity, I got her to spend it in erecting a temperance hall right in front of his distillery gates? Well, not filial, I'm afraid. What fun we had, De Berenger and I, a few years ago, with those ridiculous temperance lectures! We never did the slightest good, that I know of, but we taught ourselves to speak by means of them. They were all on the other tack. What a fool, and what a madman, and what a sinner the drunkard was! and no hint that anybody else was at all to blame. And so drunkenness is going to be done away with, is it, cobbler? Time will show, but not my time, I think. Well, Peep, old fellow, how are you getting on?"

Little Peep replied that he had coughed a good deal, but that it had refreshed him to think of his talk with the cobbler.

"Ah, yes! you temperance fellows all talk of 'the cause,' as if it was the only cause worth living for. What a fool that cobbler is!"

Little Peep here repeated a text to the effect that God made use of the foolish wherewith to confound the wise.

"Yes, when you take to quoting Scripture, I'm always stumped," said Lord Robert. "It's my belief that every temperance man you meet with you write his name in your note-book, and say a prayer for him at night when you go to bed."

Lord Robert did not intend to be profane, but he felt that he had described something ridiculous — suitable for little Peep, but not for a manly character.

"Ye-es," said little Peep, with that pathetic air of wisdom which looked so foolish, "I always pray for them. I think we all pray for one another, and that's why — "

"Why, what?"

"Why we are getting on — so fast."

"Oh!"

"But I say, Bob?"

"Well? However, I know what you mean, so you need not say it."

"What do I mean?"

"Why, that, considering what a promising young fellow I was, a temperance lecturer, and all that sort of thing, it is odd that I should be turning out no better than my neighbors, and almost wicked enough to make fun of 'the cause.' But what is at the bottom of nineteen-twentieths of all the crime in the country, Peep — mine as well as other men's? You ought to know." Here he imitated the countrified twang of the cobbler. "It's all the drink, sir — the drink as has done it."

"The drink, Bob? You're joking."

"Not at all. The drink is going to pay my debts and give me a large fortune, with a pretty wife. Therefore, as Hamlet said, 'I can't make you a sound answer; my wit's diseased' — so I say. I can't cant any more against the drink; my tongue's tied."

"It wasn't cant, Bob."

"No; but look here, Peep. I don't want you to

think me any worse than I am. De Berenger took up the subject in good earnest. I helped him for fun. It never was one that I should have chosen of my own accord. Long before I met with Fanny I gave up lecturing."

"Ye-es," said little Peep; "and you and De Berenger gave me a lot of the lectures. I got" — here he considered a moment — "I got four hundred pledges — in all."

"Then you've done all that more for the world than I have done. I never got any."

"I liked lecturing."

"Yes, you good little fool," thought Lord Robert. "With what joy and pride you stood forth with another man's lecture before you! How you got them up beforehand, with that Scotch minister to coach you!"

"I often think — I shall never lecture — any more, Bob." He looked inquiringly at Lord Robert as he spoke.

"Nonsense, nonsense!" exclaimed Lord Robert, in reply. "What do you mean, man? You'll be all right when that cough of yours gets well;" then, knowing that it was unfeeling to make light of what was so serious, he added, "We shall be in town in a week or so, and then you can have more advice about it."

"And it's such a little cough," said the poor young fellow. "But sometimes I feel so weak, Bob, I don't know what to do. I feel — almost as if I was going — to cry."

"Why, there's my brother, in his dog-cart," exclaimed Lord Robert, suddenly turning his back and speaking hurriedly. "Look! he's coming through the lodge gates. I'll meet him. He'll take you up; he can easily drive over the clover, and it has done raining."

"Poor Peep!" was his comment on the conversation as he strode on. "I like that fellow, and felt almost, when he said that, as if I could have cried too."

Some hours after that time there was great surprise and much regret, as well as discomfort, in Hannah Dill's

late home, for the three Mr. de Berengers, with their aunt Sarah, and also Amabel and Delia, drove up, luggage and all, in two flys, and the door was opened to them by Jolliffe, who informed them that Mrs. Snaith had not returned home at the appointed time, but that a telegram had been received from her. "And what it means, sir, and what Mrs. Snaith can be thinking of to act so by you, and when there's so much extra work too, I, that know her so well, can no more tell," said Mrs. Jolliffe, "than I can fly. The telegram is on your study table, sir."

Thither the party proceeded.

The telegram was dated from some little junction that none of the party had ever heard of. Mrs. Dill had found opportunity to send it off while Uzziah bought the food which had been eaten under the cow-shed. After the due direction, to "Mrs. Jolliffe, at the Rev. Felix de Berenger's," &c., it ran as follows: —

"DEAR FRIEND, — I am that hurried that you must excuse mistakes. I could not come home last night. I never do expect to see you again, nor get back to my place. Give my dear love to the precious young ladies."

"She must have paid two shillings for this," exclaimed Sarah.

Tears were rolling down Amabel's cheeks. "Mamsey gone — Mamsey," she almost whispered. "Shall I never see Mamsey any more?"

"I don't believe it!" exclaimed Delia, indignantly. "She never would be so unkind." Then Delia began to sob and cry, and came to kiss Felix and lean on his shoulder, and beg him to say he was sure that Mamsey would soon come back again.

"My dears, my dear girls!" cried Sarah. "Mrs. Snaith was certainly a most kind and attentive nurse to you; but really, to cry about her suddenly leaving you, is too much. Perhaps — "

"Well, what, 'perhaps,' Cousin Sarah?" sobbed

Delia. "Do you mean, perhaps she'll come back again?"

Dick all this time was devoured with jealousy, and Amias wished devoutly that Amabel would come and lean so on his shoulder.

"And I was cross to her the day before yesterday," sobbed the repentant Delia. "I said she hadn't ironed my flounce nicely. Oh, Coz, do say you're sure she's coming back again!"

Here Amabel melted into tears anew, and both the girls, as by one impulse, darted out of the study and rushed upstairs to their own bedroom to cry together.

Poor bereaved mother! Those were the only tears her children ever shed for her, and she never knew even of those.

Amabel and Delia came down to supper looking so sad, that the subject of Mrs. Snaith's sudden withdrawal was avoided as by one consent; but whether Sarah could have refrained from it if she had not already exhausted her vocabulary of blame on the poor absentee, may well be doubted.

"Yes!" she exclaimed, as the two poor children, clinging together, went away the moment they had finished their meal. "Yes, this ought to show you, Amias, how wrong it is to excite the feeling of the lower classes about temperance, or any other of your modern inventions."

Amias looked amazed, and Sarah, finding herself in possession of the house, continued—

"Yes, the girls told me when they came home that the speech Amias made agitated Mrs. Snaith to that degree, that she actually fainted — fainted dead away — and before they could get her to revive, she moaned most distressingly. And there was a horrid little lame man, all the time she was insensible, who told the most terrible anecdotes about drunken men killing their wives. Delia says he quite frightened her, and she was thankful when Mrs. Snaith was able to rise and come away. So now Felix has lost a most excellent domestic; and very likely she has gone off, under a mistaken impres-

sion that it's her duty to turn temperance lecturer herself, as those American women did."

"It's not in her," said Felix; "she is not that kind of woman."

But Sarah was not to be repressed. "There is nothing so unlike themselves," she continued, "that people will not do it under a fanatical impulse. I myself felt strongly inclined to lay my pearl necklace in the plate once, when that bishop (you know his name, Felix; I forget it) — that bishop preached about money for the Indian famine."

"But you didn't do it, aunt, did you?" asked Dick.

"No. Now, Dick, I have several times pointed out to you that you should never have jokes and laugh at them apart, in the presence of others. Yes; you looked at Amias in such a way just now, that, if it had not chanced that I was talking on a serious subject, I should certainly have thought you had some joke about me."

CHAPTER XXV.

AMIAS rose early the next morning and went into the dewy garden. It was looking its best. Red lilies and white ones stood side by side scenting the air; a thick bush of climbing clematis leaned towards him from a tall cherry tree. Towering hollyhocks in a long row went straight across the garden, and directed the eye to the old yew-tree hedge, which looked almost black in its shady station.

"I must leave it, and leave *her*," thought the lover, and turned to look at the white-curtained windows, behind which he supposed Amabel to be sleeping. Felix was seen advancing, and forthwith Amias began with diligence to examine the beehives, before which he had been standing.

A certain something of which he had hitherto been scarcely aware, now made itself manifest to him. It was this: that he had begun to think Felix was a man to be much considered, that it was natural to respect him.

Felix had been pleasant and brotherly, of course, but his manner now and then had been changed a little, just for the moment. Amias had been sensitive to this change; had shown a certain deference toward Felix, which it now occurred to him that the latter had taken advantage of. Had he accepted it as his right? Amias could not help thinking that he had, and he chose to pretend to himself, as Felix approached, that there could be no reason for this, and that it had better be done away with.

Well, then, he would do away with it, and address Felix exactly as he should have done in the old days, without thinking of what he was going to say. Ridicu-

lous! The idea of considering how he should address his own brother, on occasion of their first meeting in the morning! But here he stood, staring at the beehives, and knowing that he *was* desirous to please Felix, and undecided what to say, knowing now that Felix, standing beside him, felt no answering embarrassment.

"I feel exactly as I might if he was her father," thought the poor victim; and now the whole thing was confessed to himself. And still he watched the bees coming out, and still Felix did not speak.

"What a strong smell of clary there is!" he said at last.

"Yes," said Felix, indifferently; "so many bees settling on it and fluttering about it, cause it to give forth that strong odor."

Amias, while he said this, had time to remember that the last thing the girls had done before they went to the seaside, had been to pull the clary blossoms and spread them on sheets of paper in a spare attic, to be dried for making wine, and that the scent of clary was so strong on their gowns and capes when they came in, that they had been obliged to change these habiliments. Mrs. Snaith had hung them in the air on a clothes-line. How interesting they had looked — especially one of them.

"Fool that I am; he is thinking of the same thing," thought Amias. "What could possess me to mention the clary, for —"

"That reminds me —" said Felix, calmly, and paused.

"I knew it would," thought Amias, and he interrupted. "I always think the emanations from that plant must have substance. Surely, with a magnifying glass, one could detect the particles floating over the flowers?"

"I think not," said Felix, who, not being himself embarrassed, could easily get on without returning to his first opening. "I think not. But, Amias, I'm glad you rose so early, for I particularly wanted to speak to you."

"To speak to me, old fellow? Oh — well, let us sit

down, then." He moved on with a pretence of calmness, possessed himself of a stick as he went, and acknowledged to himself that he was quite sure what the talk was going to be about. "How beautiful and how dewy everything looks!" he said, as they sat down on a rustic bench.

"Yes," said Felix again.

Amias took out his knife and began to whittle the stick, because he had an unwonted consciousness of his hands; they seemed to be in his way.

"I wanted," said Felix, "to speak to you about Amabel.

Amias could not say a word.

"Have you considered that she is not yet out of the school-room?"

Amias said nothing, and Felix quietly went on.

"I should like to know whether you are aware how extremely young she is?"

Then he felt obliged to answer. "Yes, Felix, I am; I know she was sixteen on the twelfth of last month."

"I think you have been taking some pains to please her."

"I don't know that I have any cause to suppose that you would dislike the notion of my having succeeded."

"Have you succeeded?"

"I don't know."

"You must not make any more efforts in that line — at any rate, for the present."

Here the worm felt as if he was going to turn. But he did not; he remained silent.

"I think I have a right to say that you are not to pay her any more of these half-playful attentions," continued Felix, "or we shall get nothing more done in the school-room; and also that I cannot allow her, at her tender age, to receive any letters."

"Playful attentions — playful!" repeated Amias, with a burning sense of wrong. "Do you mean to say that you think I am not in earnest?"

"No, my dear fellow," said Felix, with perfect gentleness; "I had no idea of saying anything to annoy

you. But perhaps I may say now, that she certainly is not old enough to know her own mind, and therefore, for your own sake as well as for hers — "

"My own sake!" exclaimed Amias, with scorn. "Pray leave me to take care of my own feelings; speak only for her sake, and of hers."

"I take for granted that she is old Sam's granddaughter," continued Felix, "and that he has ascertained the fact, because, though he has never been at the pains to let me know it, he continues to treat the girls with constantly growing affection. If, therefore, you think he has a better right over her future, or think that the general facts of the situation throw her more naturally upon his care than on mine, you may go and speak to him if you wish it."

"I think nothing of the kind, Felix. I beg your par don for my heat. If she had been a brother's child instead of a cousin's, you could not possibly have done more — only — "

"Only what?"

"It hurts me deeply that you should disapprove in this general way. If you have any particular fault to find with me — "

"I have certainly a particular fault to find with you, and no other. It is that you have made love to a good little girl, who was very happy, obedient, and childlike. I notice a difference in her; you have robbed her of a full year of childhood."

"Have I?" said Amias, in a choking voice.

But he hardly knew whether the accusation was most bitter or most sweet. He thought he would rather have died than have made this sweet creature restless and unhappy. But then her unrest, if she felt it, was on *his* account!

"If she was a year or two older, then; if I was willing to wait," he began; but oh, what a long time even one year seemed! He paused to consider it.

"Yes," observed Felix, "if she was two years older — that is, if you like to wait two years and then come — you may say what you please to her with my ap-

proval, provided nothing whatever is said now, and nothing written."

"I meant to say something decisive before I went," said Amias, under a deep conviction that some other fellow would seize upon his jewel, if she was left free for such a long time. He expressed this alarm to his brother at great length.

Felix was not in the least impressed. "Amabel is not the only young girl in the world, that every man must needs fall in love with her," he remarked.

Amias thereupon, at equal length, argued that she was, as it were, *almost* the only young girl in the world — so much more charming, desirable, sweet, &c., &c. He rather hinted this than said it. Felix would not have found any raptures bearable, and, besides, his raptures were far too deep to be spread forth to the light.

For all reply to this Felix said, "But she never sees anybody."

"Never?" cried Amias.

"Excepting a curate now and then."

Amias admitted to himself that he was not afraid of the curates.

"But in the shooting season, and at Easter, Uncle Sam has a houseful of fellows."

"And she will see them at church," answered Felix. "Yes, she will. Well, you must run that risk." He spoke of the risk with a contempt which Amias thought not warranted.

"And they will see *her*," he continued.

"And ask Sir Samuel who she is," observed Felix. "I should much like to know what answer he will make to that question when it shall be so asked that he must answer."

"And *you* see her," Amias was about to add; but he paused, and yet the flash that came into his eyes, and his sudden checking of himself, were so manifest that Felix noticed them.

"Well?" he inquired.

"It was nothing — at least, nothing that I care to utter."

"Then it must have been what I suspected." He laughed, and his dark cheek mustered color. "Why, you ridiculous young fellow!" he exclaimed, laying his hand on his brother's shoulder. "Are you preposterous enough to be jealous of — *me?*"

"No, I am not; but any other man might be!"

Felix looked at him.

"How can you possibly suppose I could fall in love with one of these dear little girls?" he said, in a tone of strong remonstrance. "I stand almost in the relation of a father to them."

"I should say, on the contrary, that your position toward them makes it quite inevitable that you should fall in love with one of them, unless you already love some one else."

"Besides," said Felix, not directly answering this last thrust, "I should not care to be more nearly allied to John — poor fellow! — if John's they are. And if they are not, I certainly should not care to be allied to nobody knows whom."

Amias winced a little on hearing this, but Felix had not done with him.

"However, it is not impossible that you may be right," he continued, not without a touch of bitterness. "It may make you feel more at ease to learn that I have been *these many years* attached to some one else."

No more jealousy was possible now, but also no more rebellion. Felix was master of the situation.

"And so," he said, as he rose, "if you wish this time two years to see Amabel, you will come here again; and in the mean time I consider you are bound in honor to leave her absolutely alone, and not make her an offer till she is eighteen."

He looked at Amias, who had to answer, "I consent."

And just as he said it, Amabel and Delia came down the garden, as if on purpose to show him how hard his newly vowed contest was to be. He did not say a word, but his eyes dwelt on Amabel's face. There was a tender sadness on it — a certain, almost forlorn expression. We understand people so well when we love them.

Amias felt that this fair young creature had been so waited on, so attended to, so watched and loved by her nurse, that, this tendance and this fencing in from loneness withdrawn, she was looking about her, as if she felt herself pushed out into some colder world, and knew not how to order herself in it. He remembered the flattery of observance with which "Mamsey's" eyes had dwelt on her young lady. Sometimes he had thought that his eyes, waiting on her, had not been unmarked either. But she was not thinking of him now.

"Is there any letter, Coz, from Mrs. Snaith!" she asked.

"No, my dear — none."

"What do you think she means, Coz? It cannot be that she is ill?"

"No, my dear; I feel confident that she is not ill."

"But have you any idea what it all means?"

A certain something passed over the face of Felix then, which Amias noticed as well as Amabel.

"You have, Coz?" she said.

"I have no *definite* idea," answered Felix. "Even if I had, I could not tell it to you."

Amias noticed that he pitied the two girls in this withdrawal of their faithful maid and old nurse, far more than he did himself in the loss of an excellent domestic.

All this time the girls had been standing before the two brothers, who were seated; but now Delia made herself room beside Felix, and Amias, starting up, moved to Amabel to take his place; so now Felix was sitting between the two girls, and Amias was looking at the group. That Felix remembered just then what had so lately passed between him and his brother was evident, for as the two girls seemed to lean towards him for comfort and support, his dark face again took on a hint of color, his eyes flashed as if with involuntary amusement, and he even looked a little embarrassed.

Foolish Amias! How could he have put such a thought into his brother's head?

But here was Aunt Sarah coming also, her carrot-

colored curls flying, and her pink morning wrapper jauntily fastened up with a silver clasp.

It was rather a narrow gravel walk that led to the house, and the girls went in to breakfast down it, pressing their skirts to them, lest the dewy, bending flowers should wet them. Sarah followed next, then Felix, and lastly Amias, which arrangement he naturally felt to be very disagreeable.

"Should he read to them that morning?" he inquired of the girls after breakfast, in the presence of Felix.

"No, they had no time, thanks; they were going to be extremely busy."

Amias sighed, and after breakfast disconsolately wandered about indoors, or read the various newspapers that he always had sent to him wherever he was. At last, about eleven o'clock, he saw the two girls sitting together under the walnut trees, shelling peas for the early dinner. He joined them. Jolliffe was very busy, they said, and they had asked her what they could do to help, now dear Mamsey was gone. So she had asked them to gather some fruit and the peas, and then to shell them.

"You might have let me help!" exclaimed Amias.

"Coz never helps at that kind of thing," said Delia, as if this was an exhaustive answer.

"Fancy Coz shelling peas!" said Amabel.

Dick was gone: he had departed the previous evening, to stay two days with a boy friend.

"Dick will be back to-morrow," observed Delia, "and then we can make him help." There was no emphasis on the word "make;" it only expressed a familiar truth in simple language.

"Dick is a lucky dog," said Amias, forgetting himself; "he will have another three weeks here before he goes back to school." He spoke with such bitter regret in his voice, that the girls both looked at him.

"Don't you like going away?" asked Delia, composedly.

Here he remembered his promise. "Not particularly," he said.

"Then, why don't you stay?" she inquired. "I'm sure Coz would be very glad — and so should we," she added, and stooped to seize another handful of pods with her dimpled fingers. Amabel had a more slender hand; she held it out just then, half full of peas, and as they ran out into the dish, he noticed a handsome pearl ring. He had observed it before, with certain misgivings. How could he possibly go away with any doubt as to the meaning or history of that ring? There had been neither assent nor dissent in her face when Delia had said "so should we;" she had not looked up at him.

His thought was urgent for utterance, but it would have been contrary to his promise to ask such a question as he would have liked to do. He said, "that ring runs a risk of being stained with the peas."

"Does it?" exclaimed Amabel, hastily; and she drew it off, coloring with anxiety, as he thought, while she looked at it.

"And pearls, you know, will not bear soap and water," he continued.

"It's all right," said Delia; "I saw you," she continued, in a rallying tone, to her sister. "I saw you take off your glove in the ribbon-shop the other day, and let your hand hang out over the ribbon box — pretending to choose; I saw you stick your finger out, fastening your cuff, the other day on the pier, that those two lieutenants might see it. Dear creature! And she promised to give me one too," continued Delia, with a sigh.

"*She* promised!" exclaimed Amias, with involuntary delight. "Oh, it was a lady who gave it, then?"

"It was dear Mamsey," said Amabel, taking up the ring and putting it gently to her cheek, and then to her lips. "She saved out of her wages for three years and bought me this. It has some of her hair in it. And I asked her to let her name be engraved on the inside, and she had it done, but only her Christian name, you see."

She let Amias receive the ring in his hand. He

wished he might have kissed it too, but he only looked at it and saw the name, "Hannah."

Amabel was beautifully shy now. She blushed, because she felt that Amias would know she had been glad to explain to him about this gift of a ring; but just as he, finding no pretext for holding it longer, was stretching out his hand to return it, Aunt Sarah came out again, meddling old woman! He thought she looked inquisitive, and perhaps Amabel thought so too, for she shelled the peas with great diligence for a few minutes more, and then the task was finished. One of the girls carried in the peas, the other the basket of pods, and Sarah and Amias were left alone together.

Amias did not see Amabel again till the early dinner, and very soon after that Sir Samuel appeared. He had brought two ponies, and proposed to take both the girls out for a ride.

Circumstances were helping Amias to keep his promise. The girls considered it a great treat to go out riding with Sir Samuel.

While they were gone upstairs to put on their habits, Mrs. Snaith's departure was mentioned by Sarah. She wished very much to know what she might have confided to the old man; whether it was through her, or through John himself before his death, that these girls were known by him to be his granddaughters. That he did know it she had no doubt, else why was he so fond of them?

"Not gone for long, I suppose?" he said coolly.

"Yes, gone for good," she replied.

"Where is she gone, then?" he inquired sharply.

"That we cannot tell, uncle. You can see the telegram."

Sir Samuel turned the telegram about, read it with earnestness, and almost, as it seemed to Sarah, with consternation.

"It does not signify, of course?" said Sarah, in a questioning tone.

"What does not signify?" he replied. Having scrutinized the telegram thoroughly, he was now folding it

up, and presently he put it in his purse, and stood for some minutes so lost in thought, that when the girls came in ready for their ride he did not notice them.

"Well, good-by, my dear," he said at last, to his niece Sarah. "I cannot have you to luncheon to-morrow, though I said I would. I am going out."

CHAPTER XXVI.

AMIAS was exceedingly vexed, when, about two hours after this, Sir Samuel rode up to the rectory door alone.

He had been pacing about on the lawn, and cogitating over his chance of lifting Amabel down from her pony.

Sir Samuel laughed when he saw him. It was a good-natured laugh, but not altogether devoid of a little harmless malice. Amias had come up to him to ask what he had done with the girls, but this laugh awoke in him an uneasy suspicion that the "grandfather" might have observed his devotion, might have other views for Amabel — might not approve.

"Ah, Mr. Lecturer," said Sir Samuel, and laughed again. "You were not aware, I suppose, that I was among your auditors the other day when you were holding forth on the common?"

Amias felt rather foolish; wondered whether he had been extravagant in any of his assertions. He was relieved to find what the laugh meant, but he longed for some opening for asking about Amabel.

"I did not mind it," continued the old man, naturally feeling that Amias would rather he had not heard that particular speech. "You are a born orator, my lad. Tom — Tom always used to stutter so when he tried to speak. I shall never make anything of Tom. I should like very well to see you in the House, where you would have matters worth mention to spend your eloquence on. Should you like it? Eh?"

"Very much, uncle; but there is no chance of such a thing for a long time to come."

"You had no notion that your old uncle was present, had you?"

"Of course not," exclaimed Amias, quite shocked.

"And if I am not mistaken, there was no personal feeling in your invectives—none of them were directed specially against me?"

He touched the young man's shoulder with his riding-whip so gently, that it was almost like a caress; he spoke as kindly as a father might have done.

"How should I have any personal feeling against you, uncle?" exclaimed Amias. "I always think of you as the kindest person I know. What do you take me for?"

"You young fanatic," said Sir Samuel, laughing, "do you really think it your duty to keep out of my way?"

"No!" exclaimed Amias, with genuine astonishment.

"Then, why do you never come near me when I am in London?"

Amias here felt extremely ashamed of himself, for the whole conversation was such a confession of liking on the part of the old man, and he felt that on his part nothing had signified but that he should know why Amabel did not appear. It was hard on the old uncle. It was a shame.

That last question really made him able to think of the matter under discussion, and at the same moment came a flash of recollection that this was *her* grandfather who was so kindly disposed towards him.

"You quite astonish me, uncle," he said. "If you invited me to come to your house in London, I should be truly pleased, but—" Here he paused.

"'But you never do,' was what you were going to add, wasn't it," said Sir Samuel. "That is true. Well, I thought, if I did, you might be afraid I should tempt you to join me again."

"I never could have had such an idea," exclaimed Amias, very much surprised.

"Well, then, come and see me whenever you have nothing better to do."

"I will, uncle," said Amias, with cordial earnestness.

"For," continued the old man, "I feel sometimes a great wish to have some of my own people about me." ("He never shows any care to have Felix about him," thought Amias.) "Tom has been away so long."

"He'll be home soon for his long leave," observed Amias, consolingly. "But he'll go to his wife's people," said the old man. "I shall see very little of him. His wife's people are everything to him. And since I lost John — You don't remember John very well, do you?"

"I was almost a child when he went abroad," said Amias, faltering a little over those last words. He remembered no good of John, of course. "I can recall his face sometimes," he added.

"Ah! he was a fine fellow — a dear fellow. He would have come home long before this and been my companion," said the father. "Tom's a good fellow too, only he's taken up with other things. He has been very long away, and you know the proverb says, 'Better is a neighbor that is near, than a brother far off.' That son John of mine — he is very far off, though always in my thoughts."

"Why, what a strange quotation, and what a confused speech!" thought Amias; "but he never can bear to speak of John." Then, intending to console, he said, "But I am more than a mere neighbor, uncle, you know. I am a blood relation, and of course I cannot help feeling an affection for you — *and for Amabel's grandfather*," was the addition in his mind. It gave a natural and pleasant earnestness to his tone, which was as cordial as his feeling.

Sir Samuel smiled, and was manifestly pleased. "The young," he said, "never return the affection of the old, but they give them what they can, my boy. God bless them! they give them what they can."

Amias could not be so base as to pretend for a moment that he had any such degree of regard toward Sir Samuel, as the old man had made evident toward himself; he felt at that moment that he had always been aware there was, according to the proverb, a "good deal of love lost" between them, and that now he must

cultivate some return. Amabel would make this easy, and now he ventured to say, "Where's Amabel, uncle, and where's Delia?"

"I left them at the Hall.—Oh! here you are, nephew parson. I came to find you and your aunt Sarah. I left the girls at the Hall; they are going to dine with me, and I'll send them home at night in the carriage, unless you can spare them for a few days. In fact, I have been thinking that you might be glad, as Mrs. Snaith is gone, if I took them in."

Amias was desperately disappointed, but not a word could be said by him, and Sarah arranged the matter, and sent off her maid in charge of the various things that they would want.

"Come and dine with me to-morrow, Amias," said Sir Samuel as he rode off; and this, at least, was a consolation.

"I wonder whether it would make any difference to his liking for me," thought Amias, "if he knew that I loved his favorite granddaughter?" He revolved this in his mind till the evening, when Dick came home, and was extremely sulky when he found that the girls were out; very angry with them, too, for accepting the invitation, and much inclined to be uncivil to his aunt Sarah, when she enlarged on the convenience of the plan.

"It's a disgusting sell!" quoth Dick. "What is a fellow to do loafing about the place by himself?"

"In my opinion," said Aunt Sarah—"yes! in my opinion—a 'fellow' could not do better than get some cow-parsley to feed the rabbits."

"I shall feed Delia's rabbits," replied the schoolboy; "but as to Amabel's, she should not have left them. She is old enough to know better."

"Well, you may leave Amabel's to me, then," said Amias, with what was meant to be a gracious air, but which had far too much eagerness, and too much the manner of one seeking for a privilege.

And what a privilege it was! What interesting rabbits those were! All the information that Dick volun-

teered about them was so delightful. "Delia 'swapped' that old doe with Amabel for two bullfinches; the bullfinches fought and killed one another, and then Delia said she ought to have the doe back again, but Amabel wouldn't give it to her."

"And very right, too," exclaimed Amias.

"But Amabel generally gets the worst of it in all her bargains with Delia," observed Dick. "Delia's such a shrewd little puss; she can take anybody in."

"Gets the better of Amabel, does she?"

"Yes; Amabel's rather *soft*. However, they both cried like anything when a third of the bullfinches picked his brother's eyes out. That's the only thing I don't like about girls; they're so tender-hearted. Felix took the blind bullfinch away, and did for him, out of their sight."

Amias inspected all the pets and helped to feed them, waiting on chance for a word about Amabel; then he went and found his brother Felix.

Felix was up in the church tower. The parish clock was unconscionably slow. Felix was having it put right, and agreeing with the man who had regulated it, to let a good many of the cottagers know of the change. He never had any alterations made during working hours, or either the farmers or the laborers would have felt themselves aggrieved.

Amias looked out upon the chimneys of the rectory house, and at the long white road in the park that led up to the Hall. Then the two brothers got on to a convenient little platform on the roof and enjoyed the cool air, for it was a hot evening.

"I have been thinking, old fellow," said Amias, "about some of the things you said this morning of Uncle Sam."

Felix had actually forgotten for the moment the sentence that he was alluding to.

"The fact is," continued Amias, "I always knew that he liked me."

"Of course," said Felix; "he never sees me without asking after you. I believe he likes you almost as well as he does Tom."

"Well, and I like him well enough."

"So I suppose. If I had to drive bargains with him, I should not like him; as it is, we get on excellently well. I should think he will take the girls away when they are grown up."

"I have been thinking, Felix, if it really would not annoy you at all, I should like to do as you said this morning. I was either to abide by your wishes, you know" — he said this half reproachfully, for Felix did not seem quite to understand him — "or you said I might consult him about Amabel. I think I chose amiss. I wish you would consider that the matter has yet to be decided."

"Well?" said Felix.

"Of course I shall always feel that you have been everything to the girls. If I ever win Amabel, I shall feel deeply grateful to you; in fact, I do now."

"And you want to lay the matter before old Sam instead?"

"Yes."

"You are bold."

"Am I, Felix? Well, I shall ask for nothing but his consent. He hates laying money down. In my case he will know, for I shall tell him, that I expect none, and in fact — "

"In what should have been the sequel to those last words lies the gist of the matter; and if he is to give his beautiful grandchild nothing, she ought not to marry a man of very moderate means."

"Very true, Felix; but I tell you I love her, and the more doubt there is as to his consent, the more I feel urged to speak. Besides, he has asked me to come and see him in London, and expressed great regard for me. I must not go and see him and make myself as agreeable as I can, and all the time feel that I am doing it not for his sake but for hers."

"You are aware that I know nothing about her parentage."

"Know nothing?" repeated Amias.

"I conjecture a good deal, but I *know* nothing. As I said this morning, I take for granted that these are John's children, and that is all."

"Yes, Felix, I am aware of the fact. It makes no difference to me."

"If old Sam knows anything more, it sometimes occurs to me that it cannot be agreeable, or why should he keep it to himself?"

"I am not such a fool as to dislike the notion of the dissenting minister's daughter."

"Of course not. Who is?"

"I have always known that there was some sort of doubt as to their parentage."

"Some sort of doubt? That exactly expresses the matter; and occasionally it occurs to me that this doubt is less a disadvantage to them than the truth would be. Therefore I never probe it; I ask Uncle Sam no questions."

"I am astonished that the girls never ask any."

"They are good and pure-minded little girls, and know little of disgrace and nothing of sorrow. No one, by talking of either parents, has excited any imaginary love or fancied regrets. They do not forbear to question, but simply no questions occur to them."

"Old Sam always treats Amabel as his granddaughter."

"And such I am persuaded she is. But that does not prove that she has a right to his name."

"She shall have a right to it, though," cried Amias, "if she will only take it. But you used always to feel sure that John had married Fanny. What has made you doubtful?"

"Nothing but time. In course of time I feel that this almost must have come out. What motive could her family have for concealing it?"

"She might have run away with him."

"Yes, poor little fool, she might," said Felix, with a sigh, "and have concealed herself from them; but her marriage certificate in such a case could assuredly have been found, if old Sam had set to work to do it."

"Why, you seem to have almost taken for granted now that everything was as I most wish it might not have been."

"No; it would have cost a good deal of money to investigate the matter. I believe he also had his doubts — chose to take the children as they were, and also to save his money, hoping for the best."

"Or John might have married somebody else?"

"Even so."

"Mrs. Snaith gave over their little fortunes to you, did she not?"

"Yes, and told me nothing."

"I am very sorry she is gone."

While Felix and Amias, as evening drew on, sat looking over the harvest fields, and across to the somewhat over-wooded park, and the long, quiet mere or pool where Amias had chased the white owl and her chicken, Sir Samuel watched the two girls as he sat over his claret and they flitted about in the flower garden, and his regret was the very echo of his nephews'. He thought bitterly of Mrs. Snaith. "I am sorry she is gone," he also repeated: revolved in his mind how to find her, and regretted the whole course of his own conduct for the last twelve years.

Felix had done him no wrong. It was mainly because he grudged the expense, that he had made no investigations. The love of money almost always increases with age, and it has no relation whatever to the uses its possessor may be supposed to intend it for.

Money accumulated with Sir Samuel every year. His eldest son was dead. His son John was dead also. His son Tom was as saving as himself. Of course he looked to inherit a splendid fortune in the end, and he had a theory that when he came in for everything he should spend it freely, and live like a prince. Sir Samuel would willingly have increased his allowance. Tom accepted a certain addition, and saved it. His father was not displeased, but he told him how needless this was. He had more sense for his only remaining son than for himself. He sent a very handsome sum to his daughter-in-law, and proposed that Tom should buy her some jewels, as they were in the part of the world where these are finest; also a costly

Indian shawl or so. Tom persuaded her, who was nothing loth, to save this also. Sir Samuel began to feel disturbed; he himself always kept a handsome table, a proper stable, a due staff of servants, &c. He loved money, but he was not a miser, and he began to fear that Tom was.

"And I am saving all this for him, and neglecting the claims of my dear John's children. Ah, he was no miser," thought the old man. "But, then, as long as that woman stayed, what was the good of setting expensive investigations on foot, which would have ended in my having to make the darlings a handsome allowance?"

Sir Samuel never admitted the least doubt on that head. "I could not have let Felix keep them for so small a sum, when once I had *proved* that they were my dear John's daughters. But I am sorry. How could I guess that woman would run off in such fashion? I shall now have to bribe her to appear, and buy the information she possesses at whatever sum she chooses to ask for it. I am sorry. I would do differently if my time came over again. I suppose she thought she had waited long enough for me to speak. Well, so she had. She might well be vexed that I never asked her any more questions, or offered her anything to unseal her lips. How she would pull her dark brows down when I appeared! She must have it her own way. She has got the whip-hand of me now. What have I saved by this? Why, not much, after all. And what for? There's the pity of it. The love of money should always be kept within due bounds. I am almost afraid I have loved mine too well. The Lord have mercy on me, if it is so, and recover me into a better frame of mind!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

SIR SAMUEL went for a long drive the next morning, and did not take Amabel and Delia with him. He went to a hotel in a town about twelve miles off, and there met a man from a "private inquiry office," — a man whom he had sent for from London.

He wanted to have a certain woman found for him. He would give a handsome sum to those who could put her in communication with him; and they might offer any sum that was necessary to induce her to appear.

He began, of course, by giving her a wrong name.

Her name was Hannah Snaith; she was a widow. She was a nurse when first he met with her, and after that she had lived nearly twelve years as an upper servant in the family of his nephew, the Rev. Felix de Berenger. She left clandestinely, and telegraphed to the family many hours after her departure, to say that they need not expect to see her again.

"Did she leave her place through any fault?"

He did not think so.

"Had she left anything behind her — books, clothes, letters?"

That he did not know.

"Well, Sir Samuel, if you should hear that a *friend* of Mrs. Snaith's is making inquiries about her in the village and at the rectory, you will not be uneasy. Anything that I gather up you will learn of me by letter from a distance, and nobody hereabouts will know that you had anything to do with my inquiries."

Sir Samuel then had his luncheon, and drove home again; but before he reached his gates, a man, travelling

by railroad, walked down the village, and called at the back door of the rectory.

Mrs. Jolliffe opened it, and he asked for Mrs. Snaith's address.

Mrs. Jolliffe was sorry she could not give it. Was he a friend of Mrs. Snaith's?

"Yes, he was very much her friend. He wanted to tell her of something to her advantage. In fact, if he was not mistaken, an advertisement would come out in the *Daily Telegraph* the next day, setting forth that if Hannah Snaith, lately in the service of the Rev. F. de Berenger, would apply to ——, and certain friends named in the advertisement, she would hear of something to her advantage."

Mrs. Jolliffe was deeply interested. "If you'd put it in an Ipswich paper, now," she observed, "instead of a London one, 'twould have been more likely to meet her eye."

"You think so?"

"Yes, because she always took an Ipswich paper."

Here was a valuable clew. Mrs. Jolliffe would by no means have given it, if she had known that this man wanted to find Mrs. Snaith, whether she would or not.

The man felt his way. "Ah, true, it would have been better. An Ipswich paper? Which was it, I wonder? There are mostly two, one on each side." He seemed to be questioning more with himself than with Mrs. Jolliffe. "When there's a nice little sum of money lying ready for her, it seems hard she should miss it, just for the sake of not knowing."

Mrs Jolliffe asked him in; and out of a drawer in the adjoining room forthwith produced several copies of the *Suffolk Chronicle*.

"She was a widow?"

Mrs. Jolliffe's manner became cold and rather stiff. "She was very respectable; I should judge she was a widow. But if you are an old friend, I should judge you should know."

"Did she leave anything behind her — clothes, letters, books, or what not?"

"Yes, everything she had."

"Could you let me see them?"

"Certainly not, sir, unless Mr. de Berenger knew of it."

"Oh, I wouldn't think of putting you to the inconvenience of asking him."

"You can keep the old newspapers, sir, if you like. Do you think the money is coming to her from Australia?"

"Why should it?"

"Well, to be sure, she never said she had friends out there; but, then, she was a close woman — wonderfully close."

"Well," — taking out a pencil — "I shall advertise for her in the Ipswich papers, as you think she came from those parts."

"I never said a word of the sort, sir."

"But if her letters chiefly came from there?"

"If you'll believe me, sir," said Mrs. Jolliffe, "she never had a letter from year's end to year's end."

"It's usual to put in the maiden name as well, in an advertisement of that sort. Let me see — how did she spell it?"

"I thought you said you was an old friend," said Mrs. Jolliffe; "and you seem to know less about her than I do. Well, I don't rightly remember how she spelt it."

The man looked angry. "I shouldn't have thought you would have stood in the light of your friend," he said; but he did not like to ask what the name was.

Now, Mrs. Jolliffe was not very great at her spelling, but, feeling herself reproved, she found away out of her difficulty. "I have no call that I see to go over every letter of it to you," she observed; "if I just tell you it was Goodrich, you may write it down yourself and make the best you can of it."

Having said this, she immediately felt angry with herself, remembering afresh that it was odd this "old friend" should not know more concerning Mrs. Snaith.

"Then you think you cannot help me any further?"

said the man, blandly, but by no means intending to go.

"I don't see but what you can find any woman by as much as I have told," said Mrs. Jolliffe, "if she wants to be found."

"And why should she not want to be found?"

"How should I know? I never heard a word breathed to her disadvantage," said Mrs. Jolliffe, shortly. "I suppose you'll say next that I told you she wanted to hide herself."

After this nothing prospered with the visitor. He soon put Mrs. Jolliffe into a good temper again, and induced her to talk of Mrs. Snaith, but she either could not or would not say any one thing that was of the least use to him.

He went away, knowing, through Mrs. Jolliffe, no more than this of Mrs. Snaith: that her maiden name was Goodrich, that she had no correspondence even with her nearest relatives, and that she took in a newspaper called the *Suffolk Chronicle*.

The copies of this paper which had been presented to him, had all arrived during the time that Mrs. Snaith had been at the seaside. After anxious scrutiny the man decided that there was nothing in them that could help him, and he left the neighborhood for the present.

Sarah de Berenger was to dine with the old baronet that evening, as well as Amias. She entertained him as they drove over with remarks on the sums of money that Felix gave away in his parish. "I suppose he will never leave off while I live."

Amias smiled.

"Of course I shall *tie it up*," she continued.

"Tie what up, aunt?" said Amias, purposely not understanding her.

"Why, the property, of course. Felix is no man of business. Yes! Dear fellow, he must let my house; and I shall take care to leave all proper directions for his guidance in my will."

"Do, when you *make* it, aunt! I don't believe you ever have made one yet," said Amias, smiling.

"What!" exclaimed Sarah. "Never? What can you be thinking of?"

"You best know whether what I thought was correct," answered Amias. "And it is no business of mine."

"I cannot imagine what put such an idea in your head. Yes!"

"Oh, I always think so when people talk often of their wills," said Amias. "Why, there are the two girls walking in the park, when it's just dinner time."

"And why not?" answered Sarah. "There is a dinner party to-night, and of course they cannot be present; they are not *out*."

So this was the occasion that he had pictured to himself in such glowing colors. A family party of five. Sir Samuel drawing out the two girls and delighting in their girlish talk — in Delia's little affectionate audacities, and Amabel's sweet modesty. He should sit and look on, and then afterwards, when they retired in his aunt Sarah's wake, would come the great opportunity. He should be left alone with Amabel's grandfather, and should ask leave to make himself agreeable to this fairest creature. And she was not *out* — not to sit at the dinner table. Oh, what should he do? How ridiculous his request would appear!

Sarah was placed at the head of the table, and a good many guests were present, all of whom seemed to Amias to be more or less stupid.

He was not to see Amabel, and nothing that Felix had said produced such an effect on him as this proof of what the world thought concerning his sweet little school-girl. But she would be in the drawing-room after dinner. Yes, there she was, she and Delia, in white muslin frocks and blue sashes; she certainly did look rather young, among the young lady guests.

She and Delia were told to play a duet, and she was decidedly shy about it.

"Poor Sir Samuel!" murmured one stately dame to another.

The answer floated back to her so softly, that Amias

wondered it could reach him, though he alone of the guests was standing near. "Lovely creatures! I think he has made up his mind. He *will* introduce them, you'll see."

Amias heard this, and understood all that it implied, with an almost unbearable pang. The deep disadvantage so slightly hinted at, weighed his spirits down. Did every one take it for granted, then? He had thought, when he thought about it, that their retired bringing up had kept them out of all unkindly observation; he was bitterly angry with their grandfather for the moment. Here they were for the first time, and two women of rank, belonging to the chief families in the county, were familiarly hinting at their supposed position, as if everybody knew all about it.

For the first time in his life a kind of faintness and giddiness oppressed Amias, that made him long for air. He stood perfectly still for two or three minutes, gathering strength and steadiness to move; then, just as he observed that his old uncle's attention was attracted to him, he turned toward the nearest window and got out into the flower-garden. He walked quickly through it, amazed to find that he was denouncing his uncle, and those ladies, and John de Berenger, and his aunt Sarah aloud; that his passion was quite beyond his own control, and yet that he was trembling all over, even to the lips, so that the angry words, that came thick and fast, were so confused that he hardly knew them, any more than he did the husky voice, for his own.

He got over that stage of feeling as he walked vehemently on. This had been a stunning blow. And yet what was it more than Felix had hinted at the previous evening? Oh, it was this more, — that then they had seemed to have the subject all to themselves, as if it was or might have been sacred from all other observation, and at least more likely than not to yield comfort on investigation.

And now this painful thing had met with him in a drawing-room, so gently, so dispassionately uttered, that it seemed to admit of no denial.

Whether truth or fiction, it was a familiar opinion. Lady Lucy did not doubt that Lady Anne would understand her allusion. Lady Anne saw nothing dubious in the situation. As Sir Samuel had been silent, was it not manifest that there was nothing to say? Not that she thought so just then; the neighborhood had settled the matter years ago.

So much for letting things drift. He almost put himself in a passion again as he thought this over, and urged his way along the straightest drive in the park, walking at the top of his speed as if to get away from it. And how should he get away? He could not bear to think she should ever know what was said. He would emigrate with his darling; he would expatriate himself, that no disadvantage might ever attach to her or to their children. But what if she should find it out, and the thought should distress and sully her maiden heart?

How powerless he was! What should he do? He had walked beyond the confines of the park before he came to himself. His passionate emotion was over. He wondered at them all, at their inconceivable inertness and obtuseness. Nothing had been said, as was evident, and no awkward questions were ever asked; but these circumstances ought alone to have been enough to show what was felt.

His heart bled. It would be better for him to give up all hope. Sir Samuel was no fool; he did know, and know the worst.

He got back to the same open window that he had left, just as the last carriage full of guests drove off in the mild summer moonlight. Sir Samuel met him seemed to have been waiting for him.

Servants were in the room, putting out the lights in the chandeliers. One preceded them into Sir Samuel's own study, carrying a lamp. Amias sank into a chair, and the moment they were alone, "What in the name of Heaven is the matter, Amias? You staggered out of the room!" exclaimed Sir Samuel. "A walk at this time of night, and such a walk — and now you look — What is it, my dear fellow?"

There was alarm and there was wonder in the voice.

"You are ill; you want some wine."

"No, I don't," said Amias. "Let me alone, uncle."

There was a knock at the door, and Sarah de Berenger came in. Both she and Amias were to sleep that night at the Hall. Sarah said she wanted some letter-paper; the note-paper in her bedroom was not large enough for her purpose. Amias was sitting listlessly, with hands in his pockets, pale, and his great brown eyes wider open than usual; but the shaded lamp made these circumstances less evident, or Sarah's mind was full of other things, for she scarcely noticed his presence. She took a few sheets of paper and withdrew to her own room, and then and there she made her will for the first and only time.

Amias put his hand to his throat; his lips were dry and parched.

"What is the matter?" asked the old man, with sympathetic gentleness.

"Matter!" repeated Amias. "Matter, uncle! You have let me love Amabel and never told me."

Sir Samuel gazed at him.

"How could you be so cruel!" he continued, in a husky voice. "Not that it makes any difference. I would, I must have loved her just the same, but you might have given me warning; I should have been prepared." He spread out his hands before him, as if to express his helplessness.

Sir Samuel thought of his own morning interview at the hotel with confused alarm. Could the man possibly have come back and told Amias anything?

He brought his nephew a glass of water from a carafe which was standing on the table, and gave it to him with a trembling hand. "What have you heard?" he muttered.

Amias mastered himself and told it.

Then Sir Samuel put himself into just such a passion as Amias had done, and reddened to the roots of his white hair. He too denounced everybody he could think of, but it seemed to Amias mere bluster; the con-

viction had so thoroughly forced itself on him during his walk, that his uncle must have investigated everything.

"Only tell me what I have to hear at once," he said, and was amazed at himself when he heard a sound of sobbing, which he scarcely knew to be his own, till he felt the hot tears splashing on his hands.

"I have nothing certain to tell, Amias, my boy," said the old uncle, almost piteously.

"What, all your investigations have been fruitless?"

"No, Amias — no; but till this morning (there seemed no occasion) I never made any."

"Then it was true what Felix said!" exclaimed Amias, with scathing scorn. "You sat down in presence of this doubt, and grudged the money to be spent on giving a name to your own granddaughter." He was choked here with both emotion and passion, but astonishment enabled him to subdue the one and swallow the other, when the old man took out his handkerchief and wept quietly, sitting opposite to him, and finding for some moments not a word of answer.

"It's true, Amias," he said at last, humbly and despondingly. "I don't understand how it was, but I did let things drift; only you must remember I might have solved the doubt the wrong way. I might — "

This seemed to Amias now so more than likely, that it brought him to reason again.

"Uncle, I beg your pardon," he sighed out, for it distressed him to see the old man so utterly subdued. "I had no right to be so violent. The wrong you have done is not against me, but against them, and against yourself. How could you know — sweet creature! — that I loved her?"

"And it will be a great blow to my dear little girl if she hears this opinion. She is a very modest girl, and very religious."

"Yes, I know."

"She will be greatly shocked if she hears that her mother was a disgrace to her. But I hope for the best. She is almost a child. There is ample time for the uttermost to be done that can be done, Amias, before

you can come forward; and though you have confided your love to me, I hold you to nothing, considering the circumstances."

"I meant to ask you for her," said Amias; "and hoped to show you that, though she was somewhat above me, I had reasonable hope of being able to maintain her in comfort by the time she was old enough to bless me with her hand. But if she is a poor little waif, that a man may take and thank no father, but only God, for her, I desire no more of you than that you take her and her sister quite away from this neighborhood, and put them to a good school, so that all knowledge that would be bitterness to them is kept far away. In the mean time, I shall try to get something to do abroad, in Canada, or — well, I hardly know where I can go that ill news may not reach her. She may boast of her family, and bring out the truth, but I'll do my best."

"It's not the time to say that I should be well pleased, if all proves right, to give her to you —" began Sir Samuel.

"Yes, it is, uncle," interrupted Amias. "I feel more glad of the regard that I know you feel for me, than I ever did before. I know very well that you are the only human being that can truly sympathize with me now."

"And if there's anything in reason, or not in reason, that I can settle on her, to make it up to you —" and then he paused, suddenly remembering the affair of the necklace.

"I don't want anything," said Amias, pointedly. "Spend her fortune in finding me a good mother for her."

Extraordinary as it may seem, this speech actually raised the old man's spirits. Though he knew that some of his descendants must have his money, having to settle anything, even on his favorite Amabel, during his lifetime, he could not contemplate without a pang. He would have done it; but to be told it was not needed, was balm.

Amias sat a few minutes, getting the mastery over himself and recovering his manhood; but the side issue raised about the money had a strange attraction for the poor old man.

"She has a trifle of her own already," he said; "and people are never the worse for beginning on small means."

"And she has never been accustomed to luxury. Then you have begun some investigations? What are they?" asked Amias.

Sir Samuel told him. But Amias wanted a mother, not a nurse. He wanted an unimpeachable marriage register, and proposed that such a sum should be offered as would have set every parish clerk in the three kingdoms searching or forging; then he wearily gave it up, remembering that, if it brought nothing else, it would bring the most undesired publicity.

It was very late when the old great-uncle and Amias went, each his way, to his own apartment. Sir Samuel spent a miserable night, reviewing his own past conduct, wondering at himself, and not at all aware that the instinct of avoiding all outlay of money was so strong in him, that if parallel circumstances should occur, he would do the like thing again, in spite of this warning. Amias had exhausted himself, as much by exertion as by expression, and he slept profoundly.

He was just about to go down to breakfast the next morning, when his aunt's maid knocked at his door, and said Miss de Berenger begged that he would go first to a little morning-room that she always had the use of when she was at the Hall.

He found his aunt there, and Sir Samuel. "Yes," said Sarah, looking very much flustered, and not a little important, "I wanted you to witness the signature of this document for me, Amias — in short, my will."

Sarah's will was such a joke in the family, that, in spite of their discussion the night before, Sir Samuel and Amias exchanged amused glances on hearing this.

She tossed back her curls. "Yes, and Peach" — Peach was her old maid — "Peach shall be the other witness."

So then, with as many flourishes and as much fuss as could be got out of the occasion, the document was duly signed and witnessed.

"I deliver this," said Sarah, with awful emphasis, "as my act and deed."

Peach, as nobody else spoke, murmured, "Very well, ma'am."

Then the document was sealed up in a large envelope by Sir Samuel, who carried it downstairs. Sarah, Amias, and Peach followed. The latter seemed to think that she had not done with it yet. Sir Samuel opened an iron safe, and put in the document. Peach looked on, and when she saw it lying in state among several other documents, on a little iron shelf, she appeared satisfied, and, courtesying, withdrew.

Sarah followed, to tell her on no account to mention what had happened.

"This time," said Sir Samuel, "she can have left nothing to you, Amias, my boy. I am sorry. How many wills does this make, I wonder?"

"One," answered Amias, decidedly. "And I think she has left her property to Felix; she intimated to me yesterday that she should."

"Well, so long as she leaves it to one of you, I do not care; but, last week, she talked of building a fine new spire for D—— minster."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AFTER breakfast that morning the two girls were sent out for a ride, under charge of an old coachman, and Sarah was fetched into Sir Samuel's own peculiar den, which he called his study, that she might tell him, in the presence of Amias, all she could remember as to her first finding of Amabel and Delia. To describe her delight when she found that there was a love-story going on under her very eyes, and to describe the trouble she gave, both to the old man and the young man, would be needlessly to try the patience of any other man, or woman either. She yielded up her testimony with so much besides; she doubled back on what she had told with so many confusing comments; she took so much for granted, and she was so positive in all her conclusions, that it was not till Amias took a large sheet of paper, and, sifting out the bare facts, wrote them down, that even Sir Samuel knew on what a slender foundation he had taken for granted that Amabel and Delia were his granddaughters. But Sarah, though to the last degree romantic and unpractical, had an accurate memory, and was not untruthful. She was vexed, even to the point of shedding tears, when Amias, having done questioning her, asked Sir Samuel if he would stand an examination also; and she could not help seeing that Amias was yet more anxious to prove that the children were no relation at all to her, than she had ever been to show the contrary.

Sir Samuel was very direct and straightforward.

Amias read over his own selections from the evidence, and his countenance cleared.

"The matter seems to stand thus," he said. "Aunt Sarah saw two little girls at the seaside, forty miles from her home. Their name was De Berenger. She asked if they were John's children; their nurse declared that they were not — that they were no relation whatever to our family. The nurse took them away. Two years after this Aunt Sarah saw them again, with the same nurse, who told the same story. Aunt Sarah after this wrote and urged the nurse to bring them here. The nurse did so; but she told Jolliffe she came in order to get away from scarlet-fever, which was in a village where she had been living with them. She always said she had the sole charge of them. Aunt Sarah told Uncle Samuel of them, and he went to see them. The nurse declared to him also that they were not related to him, and that he owed them no kindness at all. She professed not to have heard of such a person as Mr. John de Berenger; but during the same interview she proposed to get a letter forwarded to him, and did it. Three years after this she gave over to Felix the money that had been entrusted to her for their maintenance, and he became their guardian. The nurse declared that the children were born in wedlock, and that she could easily prove it if she pleased. — Now, said Amias," after reading aloud, "have you, uncle, or have you, aunt, anything to add to this?"

Sir Samuel said "No." Miss de Berenger added a good many opinions and sentiments, and also some reproaches to Amias.

"But have you any fact to add?" he persisted.

"Yes, the fact that Felix believes they are John's children."

"But you made him think so, aunt. And why are these sweet and lovely creatures to have their status in society taken from them, and their honest descent called in question, that you may indulge a romantic fancy, after dragging them here that their little fortunes might help to educate Dick, and eke out our housekeeping?"

"That is a very cruel way of putting it, Amias," said Sarah, wiping her eyes, "as well as depriving my dear uncle of his grandchildren."

"If they are the grandchildren of this house," said Amias, "let the grandfather prove it; but, till then, all justice and mercy make it incumbent on us, not to give them the benefit of the doubt, but of the positive and repeated assertions of this woman that they are not related to us at all."

"How could she get a letter sent to John if she knew nothing about him?"

"I have known for years that my cousin John had communication with people here. He wanted sometimes to hear about his father, and one or two other people."

"Who told you that?" asked Sir Samuel, pleased to think that his much-loved son should have cared to hear of him, and not thinking much about those "other people."

"Jolliffe knew it, uncle. I have heard her hint over and over again, that such and such things would be known to Mr. John very shortly."

"And you never told me," cried Sir Samuel.

"I was a mere child, uncle, and I cannot say I had any distinct idea that you did not know his address; besides, children seldom or ever do tell things that they suppose to be matters of secrecy."

"There was always known to be a mystery about those children," Sarah now said. "Yes, you must admit that there was great secrecy, Amias. They know nothing whatever about their parents, and the nurse told nothing excepting — yes, she told that she brought them from London. She told it to the woman whose lodgings I first saw her in."

"Why should they not have been the children of some petty London tradesman, then — a baker, a green-grocer?" observed Amias.

"Why should they?" cried Sarah, very indignant at such a supposition.

"Let him alone, Sarah," exclaimed Sir Samuel; "he has as much right to his suppositions as we had to ours, and they are much kinder."

Amias turned to the old man. "Well, I thought it might be so, because the sum left for maintaining them

is so small. The woman, dragged by you, Aunt Sarah, among people of superior class, may have felt that to have their antecedents known, would be a disadvantage to the children. This trumpery motive may alone have kept her silent. The mother might have been a dressmaker, and the father a cobbler, for anything we know."

"Precious creatures!" cried Sarah; "and here they come. They look like a petty tradesman's daughters, don't they?" and she rose and bustled out of the room to receive the girls. To do her justice, she had a keen and tender affection for them; they were the only young things that had ever fallen at all under her dominion, and besides, they were so pretty.

Sir Samuel looked at them. Delia's dimpled face was rosy with exercise, Amabel had her usual sweet pensiveness of expression. It seemed so suitable a look for the circumstances under discussion, if she had but known them. There was a portrait of John over the chimneypiece. Sir Samuel turned, and, leaning on the back of his chair, looked up at it. His deep and enduring affection for this favorite son had been one main reason for the interest he had taken in Amabel and Delia. He had pleased himself with the thought that they resembled John. Amias also looked up; remembered what a bad fellow John had been, acknowledged a certain likeness in hue and in delicacy of appearance, but not in beauty, expression, or grace. The portrait painter had done his best, but only the bereaved and unsatisfied affection of the father could have imparted anything noble and lovable to the commonplace face.

We all try to be merciful to the delusions that come of love. Amias felt a pang of pity when he said, "Uncle, I hope you have not thought me unkind?"

"No, Amias, no. You must think of yourself, and of them. I promised you they should go to school, and they must."

"And in the mean time we must make long investigations; then, if we are so happy as to bring them home as your granddaughters, with a full and proved right to your name, you will not be more deeply thankful than I shall."

"The girls may know something about themselves that they never told us," observed Sir Samuel. "Who knows what the nurse may have said to them before she went away; or, indeed, what recollections they may have of their infancy?"

"Aunt Sarah is not the proper person to question them, and Felix would make a sad bungle of it; but, of course, it should be done."

"A very delicate matter to manage. Do you want me to undertake it?"

"If you will."

But it did not prove half so difficult as might have been expected.

Soon after luncheon, Amias drove his aunt Sarah back to the rectory. All prudence and propriety now made him feel that to say anything decisive to Amabel was out of the question. She was to go to school. He must go to school, too — a much harder one. That she did not take leave of him without a fluctuating blush, and a good deal of agitation, he might well be pardoned for perceiving; for her feeling, whether it was disappointment, or maiden shyness, or presentiment of some deeper affection, was not successfully concealed.

They all, as by one consent, went into Sir Samuel's study, for there Sarah's pony-carriage could be seen, and Sarah, with her nodding feathers, and Amias. Then, when they were out of sight, and there was nothing to do, Delia asked if they might stay, and Amabel wanted to mend the pens; Coz had taught her how to do them.

"Ah, and so you saw Coz this morning?"

"Yes, because we wanted to hear whether there was any letter from Mrs. Snaith."

"And was there, my little girl?"

"No."

"Had she ever led you to expect that she should go and leave you?"

"When she was unwell, just before she went to the sea, she once or twice said things to Delia. She often said things to Delia."

"Ah, indeed! I wonder what they were?"

Delia was seated beside Sir Samuel, on a sofa; he had always petted her a good deal. She was now smoothing the top of his velvet sleeve with her little dimpled hand; pleased with its softness, she next laid her cheek against it. Sir Samuel looked down at her childlike, untroubled face, as she lifted it up. "I don't love anybody so much as you," she said; and she leaned her cheek against this coat again, with a certain fondness by no means devoid of reverence. "But Mamsey *always* said, 'The baronet is very kind to you, Miss Delia; but he has no call to be, unless he chooses.'"

The old story!

"Did she, my pet. And what answer did you make to that?"

"I said I should love you as much as I pleased; so did Amabel."

"And what was it that she said when she was ill?"

"She said she had had a vast deal of trouble in life, and sometimes she could hardly bear to think of it; we should be surprised if we could know what she had gone through. But if she ever had to leave us, we were to be sure she loved us all the same, and she hoped we never should forget her."

"And we never shall," Amabel put in; "but still, we did not suppose she would really go."

Sir Samuel was not at all interested either in the nurse's misfortunes or her affection. He brought the conversation round again, and said, in a cheerful voice, but with a pang at his old heart, "And so she said I had 'no call' to love you. Did she never tell you anything more?"

Delia's face took on a more tender expression, and Amabel said, "She told us once — a long time ago — something more. I was a little girl then, and I was ill. It was in the night, and I cried and said I wanted a mamma too, like other little girls, that she might pet me; and then Mamsey cried."

"Well, tell me what else took place."

"Delia woke, and got into my bed to comfort me;

and Mrs. Snaith cried a long time, and said she took it unkind that we should fret after a mother, when she had always been so kind to us. Then she said that our mother was not such a mamma as I had wished for. And she told us that our mother was not a lady "

Sir Samuel started, in spite of himself. Surely this was bad news. He knew not how to ask any further question, but Amabel presently continued —

"But she said it would be very shocking and very ungrateful to God if we were ever ashamed of her, of our poor mother (who had never done any wrong to us or to any one). And she should pray for us that we never might be."

"Did she tell you when your mother died?" asked Sir Samuel.

"No; but it must have been when we were almost babies, for neither of us remember her. Mrs. Snaith said, 'Your poor mother was a most unhappy wife; your father was not kind to her.'"

"Is that all?"

"Yes, that is the very whole."

"Excepting about the picture," observed Amabel, in correction, and she looked up at the portrait over the chimney-piece. "When you were in London we came here once with Mrs. Snaith, and she saw *it*."

"Well? Speak, my dear."

"You should not have told that," said Delia, her face covered with blushes.

"I wish particularly to know what Mrs. Snaith said."

"It was rude, though."

"No matter."

"She said he was a shabby-looking little man, and had sloping shoulders."

Sir Samuel was wroth, and reddened.

"Well, what next?" he inquired.

"Delia whispered to her, 'Mamsey, did you ever see our father?'"

"Well, my dear little girl, go on."

"She said she had seen him, and he had a handsome

face — a beautiful face — and a brown moustache." When Delia had said this she burst into tears, and when she had wiped them away, she pressed her cheek again against Sir Samuel's sleeves, and said, "But I wish we could be something to you *somehow*."

The brown moustache had plunged Sir Samuel afresh into his delusion. "John wore one," he thought, "some years after that portrait was taken, and when he was a more personable and finer man."

"Now listen to me, my dear little girls," he said cheerfully. "Are you quite certain that Mrs. Snaith never happened to mention to you what church or what town your mother and father were married in?"

"No, she never did."

"Did you never ask her any questions, my dears?"

"Yes, when Aunt Sarah told us."

"And what did she say?"

"Sometimes she would say, 'I am not half such a foolish woman as Miss de Berenger takes me for.'"

"Here the mystery crops up again," thought Sir Samuel. "What could that woman's motive be?"

"And so the main thing Mrs. Snaith told you, was that your mother was a good woman, but not in the same rank of life as your father."

He did not intend to misrepresent matters when he said this, and Delia answered, in all simplicity, "She used sometimes to make use of strange phrases, and she said —"

"Well, she said?"

"She said a true church parson put on your mother's ring, and you have no call to think about your father at all."

Sir Samuel here lifted Delia's sweet face and kissed it; then he kissed Amabel. "Unless I find out something more, and can prove that these dear children are mine, as they should be, or as they should not be, I have 'no call,' as that woman said, to give them anything." This was his thought. All his thoughts about money matters were serious, and almost solemn. How little he knew when he said this, that every morning of

her life, when "that woman" prayed, she besought of God that he never might so mistake matters as to leave her children anything that ought not to come to them.

Her prayer was answered at that moment. Sir Samuel had received affection, and given it. He had received pleasure, and given it; so far all was fair. He had taken no trouble, and he was to give none. The only time he was ever to interfere in their concerns was to be for good.

And what about those investigations?

At first he paid money to make them, and they always failed. Where he heard that there were people of his own name, he looked them up; but as time went on he tried more and more to do this cheaply, and at last he first forbore them, and then justified it. For Amias was at work himself. Sir Samuel knew this, and why should the same thing be paid for twice over.

Amias left his brother the next morning without having said anything to him on this subject; he seemed to be in such low spirits, that Felix took for granted there had been some objection made by the old man to the proposed engagement. There might be another cause, and that Felix took care not to investigate.

Amias went away, and a few days after the two girls were brought home by Sir Samuel, who afterwards privately, to the great astonishment of Felix, said that he and Amias wished them now to spend a couple of years at school. He produced a check for so much more than Felix could have thought needful, and gave it with so much composure, that for a few minutes astonishment at the proposal was lost in astonishment at this unwonted conduct.

"I am not sure that I shall wish them to go," he said, after examining the check with deep but perfectly unconscious scrutiny. He had taken the children into his charge through the management of Sarah, he had gradually got used to them, then become fond of them, and now they were almost his sole amusement and delight.

He expressed this to Sir Samuel, who in return, and

not without putting himself into a passion over the story of what his two guests had said, related all that had passed, including what the two girls themselves had told him.

"Seven hundred pounds is a great deal to spend upon two years at school," said Felix, who was a good deal nettled at being thus set at nought, and expected to do exactly as other people chose — other people who had taken no trouble about the girls, and incurred no responsibility.

But the matter was soon so set before him, that he saw himself the wisdom of the step. The thing must be done, and in less than a month it was done. The most ample inquiries were made, the most excellent references required; a handsome outfit, with every little luxury and comfort, was bought for the girls under Sarah's superintendence, and Felix, after taking them to the lady who was to have the charge of them, found himself at home again, "monarch of all he surveyed," walking about his solitary garden, called in to his solitary meals, and wondering what to do with himself.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AMABEL and Delia were extremely happy with their girl companions; they made very fair progress under the masters provided for them. Amabel grew more beautiful, and Delia taller and more graceful, and, as is the way with youth, they both lived a good deal in the present. They ceased to want Mrs. Snaith, and they did very well without Coz. Of course the rectory was still home, and Coz was in their thoughts and what he would think, when they were reproved for any little acts of idleness or inattention, but Sir Samuel, now they neither heard of him nor from him, receded into the background of their minds. So did not Amias or Dick.

They did not come home for Christmas, and would have been greatly surprised if they could have known the long discussions there were between Sir Samuel, Sarah, and Felix, as to where their midsummer holidays should be spent.

Nothing concerning their parentage had been discovered. Mrs. Snaith could not be found, and there was a great wish that they should not return till something certain was known about them.

Tom de Berenger came home soon after Christmas, with his wife and another infant daughter. He had all his father's kindly, pleasant manner, and far more than his father's love of money. He was almost a miser, and one of his first conversations with Felix was a remonstrance.

How could Felix have allowed such a lavish house to be kept at the Hall? Such servants, such waste; and never, as a clergyman, have lifted up his voice against it!

Mrs. Tom de Berenger had so completely adopted her husband's views, that she never spent a shilling where sixpence could be made to do, and all her discourse was on prudence, moderation, and economy; interesting subjects when there is need to exercise them, but rather out of place where a wise liberality, hospitable fashions, and public-spirited generosity are more to the point.

Nothing in his long life had taken such effect on him, as the behavior and discourse of his son and his daughter-in-law took on Sir Samuel. He saw himself, caricatured; he was exceedingly ashamed, both for himself and for them. For Tom could discuss even at table, with all earnestness, the wasteful way in which windfall apples and pears were left under the trees, and he did not hesitate to say that "there were a great many more vegetable marrows grown than could be used in the household."

Sir Samuel, though a hot-tempered man, had great self-control, and each of his sons, one after the other, had kept that virtue in full exercise. He would redden sometimes, when his daughter-in-law would strike in after Tom, and agree with melancholy emphasis; but he generally managed either to hold his tongue or to master his temper, and rally his son with tolerable equanimity. But Tom de Berenger was one of those provoking people who are almost always serious; he would try to argue the most minute points of economy with his father, not perceiving that, whether he was right or wrong, his noticing such things at all was mortifying and ridiculous. Then, when the old man was secretly fretted almost past bearing by such discussions before his servants and his guests, Tom would make him break out at last by some finishing touch, that left it hard for other auditors to keep their countenances.

There was nothing in the nature of expenditure that was not important and interesting to him — from the fires in the saddle-rooms to the wasted ends of wax-candles.

He was a good deal out of health, and that circumstance helped his father to be forbearing. He bore a

great deal. Joan had never led him such a life as Tom did, and Tom was not half so bad as Tom's wife.

There were three nice little girls, to be sure — good, obedient children; and there was the baby, also a girl. Sometimes Sir Samuel would say something kind to their father about them. "You'll have one of the *right sort* by-and-by, my lad." "Yes," the poor fellow would answer, with a sigh, "a man had need exercise all due economy who has such a family — four daughters already — and most likely four sons coming, or four more daughters."

They had naturally, and by Sir Samuel's own desire, taken up their abode at the Hall with him, and were all supposed to find their family reunion a great blessing and comfort, but when Parliament met, Sir Samuel went to town with a certain alacrity, though Tom was to remain in the country, London smoke not suiting his delicate chest.

Amias often dined with Sir Samuel in London. His reticence as to Tom's peculiarities could not be exceeded. He had got his only child home again; come what might, he was determined to make the best of him. Tom had no debts; he was, excepting one little foible, everything that a father could desire. How much better that he should be such as he was, than a gambler or a spendthrift! He was a family man, a model father and husband. "If I only see a grandson, I shall have all that a man can wish for in this world," Sir Samuel would often say to himself. And Amias, knowing all about his troubles when in the country, cautiously forbore to ask any awkward questions; Felix having let him know that the heir went round every day to the greenhouses and forcing-houses, to see that the gardeners did not use too much coal and coke. He was said to have poked a lump out here and there that he thought superfluous; and everybody heard this anecdote concerning him, excepting his father.

After the Easter recess, Sir Samuel came to town again, looking rather worried. He had gone through a good deal, and was very glad to find that Tom and his

wife meant to go to Clifton for a few weeks. Tom had a nasty cough; his wife wanted him to try the air there, and stay with her mother.

This was all that Amias heard about the matter. He knew his uncle was in town, and meant to go and see him, but he was busy, and had not accomplished the visits, when one morning, just as he had finished his breakfast, Felix, who had come up to town for a few days, being with him, a telegram was brought in from the old uncle's head servant.

"Will you please, sir, come and see Sir Samuel? We have lost Mr. de Berenger. He died at midnight."

"Lost Mr. de Berenger!"

How terrible it seemed, when, not two minutes previously, they had been making merry over his peculiarities! Felix, so far as the title was concerned, and the very small portion of the property that was entailed, was the heir. Neither of them forgot that.

"I had better not see the poor old man," said Felix.

"But I shall be glad if you will come with me to the house," said Amias. "He may prefer to give directions to you."

"He never will," said Felix.

When they reached the house, Sarah and some weeping women-servants met them in the hall. They asked how the calamity had happened. "He broke a blood-vessel," she whispered, "and only lived a few hours. They fetched his father from the House to hear this awful news."

Amias felt his heart and courage sink, as he turned the lock of the library door, and entered it alone.

Sir Samuel was seated on a sofa, with his hands clasping his knees, and his head down. One small leaf of the shutter behind him had been folded back, and a narrow beam of sunshine streamed down from the aperture. Otherwise, nothing had been changed since the previous night, and a lamp was still burning on the table.

Amias sat down, and had not a word to say. He felt perfectly powerless to find any consolation for such a calamity as this.

The old uncle appeared to notice his presence, for in two or three minutes he slowly lifted his head, and looking at him with a puzzled and half-stupefied air, said, "I thought you would come." Then he added, in a low, inward voice, "It was one o'clock when they fetched me home; but" — spreading his hands about — "it was no use, — I had no son to send my answer to."

Amias was distressed for him to the point of shedding two or three compassionate tears, and they did more for the desolate old man than any words could have accomplished. At the sight of human emotion and pity, he seemed to wake up from the stupor that was killing him, and, as if by imitation of another, to thaw, and be no more a statue, but a man.

He was able to weep for his lost son — his last child: but the suddenness of the blow had almost prostrated him; his mind was confused, and his speech was thick.

"Is there anything I can do for you? Are there any arrangements that you would wish me to make? — or shall Felix make them?" asked Amias, afterwards.

"Felix may go to Clifton, and do — whatever he pleases. You must stay with me."

"You will not see Felix?"

"Certainly not. I have enough to bear without seeing him."

"He will not like to act without some instructions."

"Then I leave you two to arrange matters between you. *You* know that I shall be satisfied."

So the two cousins of this poor miser, having leave to do what they thought fitting for the only son and heir of the now desolate father, had his body brought home to Sir Samuel's country house, invited a number of guests, and had him buried with even more state and pomp than is usual. Considering that one of them was, in part, his heir, and that the other had been almost his rival in the old man's affections, this seemed to them to be the proper thing to do.

Amias brought the father down to attend the funeral, and Felix read the service.

"It was a grand burying," said one of the admiring crowd. "But, dear sakes! how he would have grudged the expense, poor gentleman, if he had known!"

Sir Samuel went back to his desolate home. His son's widow and her four children soon joined him, and the former made him as miserable by her jealousy of the two nephews as she had done previously by her parsimony.

"She never lets me have a quiet hour," he said to Felix; "she's always hinting that her poor children are nothing to me, compared with Amias and you."

"You might at least tell her that she has no cause for jealousy as far as I am concerned," replied Felix, in his most dispassionate manner. "But as to Amias, —I think I should be jealous of Amias, if I were in her place."

"She ought not to grudge me what little comfort I have left in this world."

"Then you should not leave her in any doubt, uncle, but tell her plainly what splendid provision there is for her and her children."

"I want Amias to live in my house always when I am in London."

Then, when Felix was silent, he went on.

"You don't suppose his temperance notions would annoy *me*? Besides, I have told you before, that I mean to retire, if I can get a good offer for the concern. Why should I keep it up any longer — that is, if I can sell it advantageously?"

Felix being still silent, he said, with irritation, "But you understand nothing of business, nephew parson."

"I can fully understand that, at your age, and with your considerable wealth, it must be best for you to retire."

He then inquired about Amabel and Delia.

Felix confessed that he could not decide where to take them for their midsummer holidays, but that he did not mean to be parted from them during that time.

Sir Samuel replied that Mrs. de Berenger wanted to

take her children to the sea; and as his affliction had been so recent, there would be no visitors at his house; therefore the whole party, including Amias and Dick, had better come and stay with him.

If Mrs. de Berenger was to be absent, Felix felt that the girls would be safe from risk of hearing anything that he wished to shield them from. She was the only person likely to speak. But he did not care to leave his own home, though he promised to bring the girls frequently to see — "to see their kind old friend," he concluded, after a pause.

In the mean time, the poor mother of these loved and admired creatures tried hard to bear her life without them. It was strange, she thought, that she should have so deeply loved her husband when he was unkind, debased, and unworthy, and yet that she could not love him now, when he was trying so strenuously to do well, when he loved her, was proud of her, and wished nothing more than to work for her and make her comfortable. She tried, with tolerable success, to hide her dislike. She never said a bitter thing, and would sit for hours patiently sewing, and never once asking him to leave off singing those hymns that she knew were intended for her pleasure and edification. She cooked his meals punctually, she kept his clothing clean and whole, but when he went out on his temperance errands, she would drop her work on her knees and think, and the tears would steal down her cheeks unaware. And her conscience sometimes disturbed her; her sense of duty sometimes appeared to pull her two different ways. Had she truly been kind to her darlings? What if, after all, they should discover what she had done? Oh how far more bitter it would be for them, than it could have been to have grown up aware of their father's disgrace! And yet what happy, peaceful lives she had bought for them, and paid for these with the best years of her own — with the effacement of her own prospects. She had lost them for herself, but won them to such a far better lot, that they could well dispense with her.

She had procured for them such good teaching, that she was for ever their inferior. She had robbed herself of their love, but she would rather rue the loss of it than that they should want for anything.

Would she do it again if her time came over again? That was the daily question she asked herself. She always answered it the same way, and prayed to God that He would not count the mistake — if it was one — a sin.

It was Uzziah's reformation that turned all her axioms into doubt; he never said any bad words now. If she had kept her daughters in their own rank of life, they might have come back to him, and learned no evil in their humble home. And he would have been pleased with them; he must have loved them. Yes, but she felt that this need not trouble her. He did well enough without them; never had seen one, nor cared for the other. She need not think of him. The children were hers, and she humbly prayed every day that she might be forgiven for the concealment she had practised, in giving up everything for their sake.

Uzziah was not very observant. He was satisfied when she would talk, and did not notice how she always drew him away from personal matters — from his expressions of pleasure at her presence, pride in her appearance, or love for her person; and was willing to hear him enlarge on his speeches of all the "temperance gentlemen" who patronized him, and the good he hoped he was doing.

Sometimes the sudden utterance of a familiar name would make her turn white to the lips.

"He's a rare one," Uzziah exclaimed one night, speaking of Amias; "he does know how to lay about him!"

She trembled on hearing this, but dared say no more than, "Oh, he do? Well, I've heard you say so before."

"Now, his brother, continued Uzziah, "I don't know what to make of him. I really don't."

"Why not?"

"Why not? Well, he doesn't seem to know how to hit the right nail on the head. Mr. Amias is all downright and straightforward. He's against the publicans and against the brewers, and more than all against the distillers. But his brother — what's his name, again? Not Stephen, I know, but something like it. His brother's notion seems to be to hit out pretty generally all round. He seems to think we're all to blame. My word, he made me feel, though I am temperance lecturing, as if he said to me, 'Thou art the man.'"

"He can't well make out that you encourage folks to drink, nor to sell drink, nor to make drink," observed Mrs. Dill, who was willing to hear anything Uzziah might have to say about her children's guardian.

"Well, my dear, in a manner of speaking, he does. A good many of the chief sympathizers were aggravated with him for that, as I could see last night. 'What's the good of our denying ourselves everythink for this cause,' says one of them to me, 'if we're to be treated like this?' I took particular notice of what Mr. de Berenger said, because I thought, so far as there seemed to be anything in the argument, I would use it. But it was nothing of an argument at all. He says the world is ruled by opinion, and that so long as folks — a good many of them — are ashamed of their opinions, then their opinions cannot spread as they should do. He says it is the Spirit of God under whom the conscience of the world grows, and it is often those who conceit themselves that they have the most light that are most full of doubt, and so keep that great conscience back from its expansion. 'If you pretend to be candid,' said he, 'and if you say that the vast body of men who get their living by this traffic can never be expected to give it up — you, too, who believe yourselves to be on God's side — you are in an awful case; you are fighting against Him. How dare you think,' says he, 'that such and such improvements are not to be expected? Who taught you that they were needed? Their guilt is small, whose covetousness urges them on to sell this poison, compared with yours, who are ashamed to be-

lieve and confess that the Spirit of God is moving yet on the dark face of the waters.'"

"Then," said Mrs. Dill — for he paused here, and she wanted to continue talking of her late master — "I expect, if we are to prepare for the time when no more spirits at all to speak of, are to be drunk, there must be hobs made to every grate, for keeping the teapots warm."

"Not so," replied Uzziah; "for, my dear, if you'll believe me, the doctors want to take a good part of our tea from us too."

"No!" exclaimed Mrs. Dill. "Well, I wonder what next?"

"Well, they say that tea — so much as many of us drink — makes folks to have shaking hands; they say there's no nourishment in it worth naming, and we ought to drink either pure water, or cocoa, or good milk."

"The land that grows barley and hops won't be enough then," she remarked, "to lay down in grass for the cows that are to yield the milk."

"Not it. I said so to Mr. de Berenger, after the meeting."

"I expect you had him there," observed the wife.

"No. What do you think he made for answer? Why, that water was one of the most nourishing drinks a man could take, and very fattening too!"

"My word!" exclaimed Mrs. Dill, quite surprised, and looking up with a soft color in her cheeks, which had been brought there by the pleasant excitement of this talk concerning one who was so near to her darlings.

"He did indeed, my dear, and Mr. Amias backed him. But if it ain't a liberty to say it, I think for once he was mighty glad to step down from the platform when our lecture was over; for if ever there were two pretty young ladies in this world, Mr. de Berenger brought those two with him, and set them down beside an old lady with long curls, right in front of the platform. And I think one of those two made the temper-

ance cause seem to Mr. Amias as if he wished it was further."

"Oh, my beauties, my dears!" thought the mother. "How near I was to going with your poor father to that lecture; and to think now that I should thank God I kept away and did not see you!"

CHAPTER XXX.

"WHEN God gives," said Uzziah, "He gives with both hands. He has given me pardon for my crimes, He has given me back my wife (ten times better than she was before), and now — this child."

Uzziah took up the baby as he spoke, and the little fellow opened his dark eyes and spread out his two-days'-old hands.

The doctor left the small clean chamber, but not without an involuntary elevation of the eyebrows, and a scrutinizing glance at this man.

"My dear," said Hannah Dill, as the door was quietly shut, "you have no call to use that word. It worry me more than I can tell to hear you do it."

"What's for ever in a man's mind must come out now and then," he answered.

Her white lips trembled slightly; and, a different husband altogether from his former self, he immediately apologized. He promised to use more circumspection. Then, mindful of her late danger, he began to employ some of the kindly flattery that a new-made mother loves best to hear, admiring the infant.

"Did anybody ever see such big dark eyes? — for all the world like yours, my dear. I hope, please God, he will be like you. A very pretty boy, to be sure: and what a weight on my arm already!"

"Yes," said the feeble mother, turning her head on her pillow, "he is a very fine babe to look to."

"I shall be as proud as ever was of the little chap," continued Uzziah, laying him down beside her with a smile of real affection; it's what I've been wanting this long time, though I scarce knew it — a child of my own.

Ever since I had you again I felt I could not be easy; as if it hurt me to see you in the house all alone."

"Did you feel to want those that are gone?" asked the mother, with a certain pang. She was beginning to do more than tolerate her poor husband, and the notion of his having yearned for the children she had taken from him gave her keen pain.

"Well, I did; but there are things you know as we agreed never to speak on."

"Ay," answered the wife, "but you may say what you have in your mind this once." She thought this addition to her punishment for having made them happy at her own expense, was a bitterness that she must not shrink from as regarded these lost treasures, and she listened when he said —

"My dear, you would have been all the mother to them. I should like to have seen it. And there ain't a doubt but what they'd have been great blessings to us, and I should soon have got very fond of them."

She looked at him with pity, almost with fear.

"Only," he continued, "they would have known."

"They must ha' known," she answered, sighing.

"Ay."

"Don't you think, then, Uzziah, 'tis best as it is?"

"'Tis best as God willed it," he answered, seriously.

"Ay; but that's not what I meant," she cried, piteously. "The only time we spoke on these, you said, 'They're well off.'"

"We know they are, Hannah."

She assented with hysterical tears. "Ay, I know my blessings, my dears are better off than ever they could be with me. Let me hear you say that you do not wish we had them again."

"I could not exactly say that, my dear; for since I knew this little fellow was coming, I have many times dreamed that I was in quod again, and that I saw that other little one with flaxen hair — a pretty creature! — trotting about on the floor. Considering what a bad father I made her, you'll think that was strange. Little Ammy — why, she would have been very nigh seventeen

year old by this time." Seeing that she was unable to restrain her tears, he added, "Don't fret, my dear; we have talked about her again for once and for all, for you see it has been once too often."

"Ay, it's more than I can bear. God forgive me!" replied the mother.

Uzziah, mistaking her meaning, continued.

"So now let them sleep in the bosom of the Son of God; you shall have them again. And meanwhile get well so fast as you may, for the sake of this new blessing."

He presently went out, and Hannah Dill turned her head, and looked with yearning pity and love at her new-born child. An inheritance of shame was his. He was to know from the first that his poor father had been a disgrace to him. But yet in this case there could be nothing to conceal; he would sit upon the knee of this man, his poor father, and get used to him — would like to drink out of his cup, and be carried on his shoulder. He would not shrink then from him. No; but perhaps he would be not the less dragged down, but the more, for that. What would a father mean in his mind? Why, somebody who was good now, but had been wicked. A father was an ex-convict, the kindest man he knew; the only one, perhaps, who was fond of him.

Must he, then, be told so young? Yes; or else it must be concealed from him till accident or necessity made him aware of it, and then he must stand the shock as best he could.

"You're not to play at getting drunk," said a poor mother to her little five-year-old boy.

"Father used to drink."

"Ay; but poor father never drinks now. He never rolls about, he never strikes Dickey now. Father's kind, father's good."

"And Dickey means to be good," said the child; "but Dickey must get drunk first, and have larks too, just as father did."

Dickey was far too young to be reasoned with, and he had something more than knowledge already. He

had experience; limited certainly, but disastrous, for it showed him that a man was a creature who ought to be good in the end, but must be expected to play with evil first; go down into the mire, in fact, and there remain, until he had sufficiently disported himself.

Hannah Dill, though her husband had loved her and trusted her, and found in her his whole delight and comfort since he had got her back, was by no means at peace; she knew that the burglary he had been tried for was not the only crime he had on his conscience. She had got used to fear, on his account; every unexpected knock at her humble door startled her. He had himself, from time to time, fits of depression, when something, she knew not what, but guessed to be the memory of a crime, would seem to fall on him like a blight; and then, whatever he was doing, he would rise and go to shut himself up in a little empty attic that they rented, and there she would hear his inarticulate crying to God, and sometimes his groans and sighs. She would sometimes steal upstairs after him and listen, but she was too much awed to call to him. Though he had risen into an atmosphere in which she could not breathe, it had been from a deep that she had not sounded. He was above her and beneath her, and she could not freely communicate with him any more than she could rest.

One evening, however, when the child was about four months old, an incident, small in itself, added greatly to her feeling of insecurity. She was nursing him, in the presence of his father, when a certain noise seemed to startle the infant, and he turned his dark eyes with an evident expression of apprehension.

"Bless the babe!" she exclaimed; "how intelligent he do look now and then!"

"He is the very moral of you," replied Uzziah, "when he looks round in that sort of way."

"Do I have a startled, frightened look, then?" she answered, and immediately repented her words, for Uzziah became extremely pale; and, looking down at her babe, she seemed to see in his little face something

like an inherited expression. As she had beheld the reflection of their father's yearning wistfulness in the faces of his sisters, she thought now she could trace the thought of her own heart in the eyes of this child.

She continued to look down on the little head, for she could not meet her husband's eyes. She heard him sob, and then he fell on his knees. "O God, it was a sin — it was a sin!" he muttered. "O God, forgive me — I took her back!"

"You did not wish to take me back?" she replied, still without looking at him. "You know we both of us wished we might part that night when we prayed as we knelt asunder on the common."

"Ay, but the next morning, and while the storm went on, and when I knew how miserable you were along of coming back to me, I seemed to be urged many times to let you go. And it was too hard."

She answered with quiet moderation. "But you cannot help but know that now I have this babe at my breast, I cannot wish what I might have done if God had not sent him. — He will never be a disgrace to us, Uzziah," she presently added, in a still kinder tone. "I have heard you pray nights for him, so deep and so hearty, as people cannot pray, I am certain, unless God has answered already in heaven. No, the poor lamb, God bless him! will never be a disgrace to any one."

"But I shall be a disgrace to him," cried the father, almost grovelling on the floor. "I shall enter in; but, oh! it will be through a bitter death, for I shall die as — as I should do."

"Who told you so?" she answered, white to the lips; and then she added more faintly, "And what death do you mean?" But she knew.

He lifted himself slightly till he could lay his arms on the seat of the wooden chair, then with his face resting upon them. "Who told me so?" he repeated. "The same voice in my soul that told me of my pardon. I am always told so. The Gospel saves, I thank my God, but the law must take its course — and it will."

"Oh! I fare very faint," cried the poor woman, and

a strange fluttering in her heart and in her throat appeared almost to suffocate her; but when she fell back in her chair, and he, starting up, brought her some water, and seemed as if he would take the child from her, she cried out, though faintly, "No, no; let him be. I shall not drop him. No."

"I'm not to touch him?" asked Uzziah.

"No."

She struggled with herself, and sat upright, though still deadly pale. The poor man was sitting opposite to her, looking more haggard and melancholy than usual.

"Uzziah," she said, "I wish to say something to you, as soon as I fare able to get out my words."

He waited some minutes, while she wiped away a few heart-sick tears, and gathered her child again to her breast.

"I wished to say," she sighed at last, "as I've noticed something in you lately that's much in your favor."

Her manner was cold, though perfectly gentle. He made no reply.

"I've noticed that you're much more humble lately — more abased before God, and quiet. I believe God have forgiven you. But this babe" — then she paused, as if irresolute; and suddenly, with passionate anguish, went on — "if God does indeed hear your prayers, I, that am his mother, beg you — I that almost died to give him birth, and that love him more than any mortal thing — I beg you to pray God to take him from me, and to leave me desolate — soon. Pray that he may be taken soon."

"You must not talk like that," answered Uzziah, with frightened eyes.

"Yes, I will. O Jesus, take him!"

"Listen to me, Hannah. I don't know how it was I came to speak so plainly, but, whatever it may cost me, if you will, I'll now let you go your ways, and take him with you."

"No. Whatever happens, I must be nigh, that I

may know it. It would seem to come to pass every day, if I was from you."

"There have been times, Hannah, when I've thought it might be my duty to confess it."

She shuddered.

"Oh, I don't mean to *you*, my poor wife."

"It could never be your duty," she answered, almost calmly, "unless somebody else was suspected—that he had done the deed, and not you."

"That is what I have come to think."

"Reach me down my bonnet, Uzziah. I shall suffocate, unless I get out into the air."

"You cannot carry the babe, Hannah," said her husband, when her bonnet was on, and she was drawing her woollen shawl over her shoulders and the infant's head.

"Yes, I can."

"It's ten o'clock at night."

"I know it is."

"Hannah, if you mean to go for good, you'll give me a kiss first—won't you, Hannah?"

She turned and looked at him as she stood in the doorway. Her intentions came like a flash, and changed so roughly that they seemed to tear her heart to pieces—as a stormy sea tears the trembling strand; her intention had come, and it was gone—for how could she kiss him?

She stood with her white face intent on his white face, and she stared into his eyes. "I am coming back," she said, huskily. "Only let me go out, if only for a moment."

"I shall not follow you, Hannah. And you may be sure that I believe you are coming back."

"Why?"

"Because, if I thought the other thing, it would be I that should go out. Would I leave my wife and babe to flee away at this time o' night? Hannah, sit you down in the rocking-chair, and I'll go, and never come near you but once a week, just to bring you what money I've earned. I'll go now. Only say you forgive me, and let me have a kiss of you and the child."

"Forgive you for what?"

"For taking you back."

"I thought at the time it were right I should come back, and I cannot think now—" Then she looked at him again—at his face, and at his hands—and knew she could not give the desired kiss; so she repeated, "And I mean to come back."

He opened the door. The night was still and dark, but quite clear. She longed for light, and wanted to see movement. The little tenement she and her husband rented, was a lean-to against some warehouses belonging to a great Manchester manufacturer; the alley, of which it formed one whole side, being faced by another warehouse, was perfectly silent and deserted at that time of night.

She went out down the alley, and soon found herself in a well-lighted street, full of shops, and, as she walked, was suddenly startled out of her deep reverie, by finding herself near a great concert-room in which a temperance lecture had lately been held, and which she had attended. There had been a concert in it that night, which was just over; the people were streaming out, and calling for their carriages. She shrank back again, and passed from among some women, who were admiring the ladies' dresses, and commenting on their appearance. There was some mistake, as there so often is. Some of the people were waiting by one door, while their carriages were at another. The shutters of a shop close to her were put up, and she leaned against them for support, while the noise made by the footmen and cabmen served in some sort to distract her from her importunate sense of misery and suffering and fear, Then, striking full on her ears, and rousing her at once to keen attention, came a name that she knew.

"Sir Samuel de Berenger's carriage stops the way." And there it was. She knew the footman, she knew the coachman, and she turned her faded eyes to mark who would enter. But no, the intended occupants did not appear, and when it had stood for ten short moments allotted to it, the police made it pass on and give way to another.

"It's a chance missed," she murmured faintly. "I'd rather have seen even Sir Samuel, than nobody that belonged to *them* at all;" and as she turned, and there were more carriages, and there was more shouting — "Come on, come on!" cried a voice close at her elbow; "I see the carriage. Keep it in view, and I'll bring out the girls, or we may wait here till midnight."

Dick de Berenger! — and the person to whom he had spoken was Amias. She stood as if fascinated, till some one brushed her elbow — a lady, who wore the hood of her opera cloak over her head. She was dressed in white, and before the poor woman could take her dazzled eyes off her, and notice that Felix had her on his arm, another lady passed on the other side, and a little laugh assured her that it was her Delia.

"Hold your shawl well over you," cried Dick; "you'll not catch cold."

The mother followed, irresistibly drawn on.

"Oh no," answered Delia. "As if I ever caught cold!"

"Amabel touched my babe's head," murmured the mother, "and my shoulder." She looked down. Yes, there was proof of it; two or three petals from an overblown rose in Amabel's bouquet had fallen on her shawl, and were resting on the head of the child.

The mother felt a strange sense of warmth and joy, as she pressed on. She could still see the carriage, and the two white figures were being quickly conducted after it. She did not dare to come very near, but she saw them both enter, and heard them speak while gathering up the fallen leaves from her shawl, as if they had been drifts from paradise.

Dick and Amias followed them in, and the carriage proceeded.

"He often talks of a particular providence," she murmured, as she lost sight of it, and mused on the little scene. They had rather enjoyed their pursuit of the carriage. They had white shoes on their pretty feet. Delia was holding up her gown with a little, ungloved hand. Their mother soothed her anguish with

thinking how lovely and blooming they had appeared, and how easy and careless. Three gentlemen to take care of them!

"It's a particular providence," she murmured. "The Lord thought upon my trouble, and has sent me a sweet drop of comfort this night."

She turned. A man was standing so close behind her that they could not but look one another in the face, and a glance of keen surprise darted into his. It was Mr. de Berenger.

For an instant his astonishment daunted her, but her homely dignity came to her aid. "I hope I see you well, sir," she said quietly. Then glancing down at her babe, "Many things have taken place since I left your service." She manifestly meant to call his attention to her child.

"It is Mrs. Snaith, I see," he answered. "We meet very unexpectedly."

"Yes, sir. I once told you something of how I was circumstanced. My poor husband—"

"I remember," exclaimed Felix suddenly, losing his air of disturbed astonishment.

"Yes, sir, it was all at once my duty to join him—nearly a year ago, sir, you know." Then, when he was silent, she added, "I did not come here with any thought of seeing the young ladies."

Tears dazzled her eyes and dropped on her cheeks; she knew not what more to say, and he said nothing. She was about to move away, when he stopped her, putting out his hand.

"I need not ask whether you have suffered," he said; "your countenance shows it too plainly. My poor friend!"

"I have, sir," she answered.

"Is the man good to you?"

"Oh yes, sir. It is not that."

"And you seem to have a fine, healthy child," he remarked, as if he would find somewhat on which to say a few comforting words.

She looked down on the little fellow, who, now awake,

was lying on her arm, staring at the gas-lamp with clear, contented eyes. "Ay, sir," she answered; "but I pray the Lord to take him from me. Bless him!" she continued, looking at him with all a mother's love. "His mother would pray him into heaven this night if she could, and not grudge the breaking of her own heart, to save him what he will find out if he lives long enough."

She began to move on, and Felix walked beside her, apparently too much shocked to answer; but when she turned from the great thoroughfare, he stopped her again.

"Listen to me, Mrs. Snaith," he said. "You have often thought of the time when you lived with me, of course?"

"Yes, sir; it's all the joy I have, to think on it."

"Do you believe that I would do anything for you that I could?"

"Yes. I don't know another such gentleman."

"Well, then, tell me. Is there anything?"

"Yes, sir, there is," she murmured, after a pause; "but it's not what you might expect."

"I don't understand you."

"It's almost strange, considering all things, that I have never met you nor Mr. Amias when I have been along with my poor, wretched husband. You might do me — oh, the greatest favor and kindness a poor creature could ask — if ever you should —"

"If ever I should see you with him?" asked Felix, stopped by his surprise, as she was by her earnestness.

"Yes, sir."

"Why, what is it, Mrs. Snaith?" he exclaimed, gazing at her in more astonishment than ever.

"To make as if you knew nothing about me, and had never seen me in your life before."

"Are you so much afraid of him?"

She made no answer.

"Give me a moment to think."

She walked before him, silent.

He repeated her words aloud to himself. "'To make

as though I knew nothing about her, and had never seen her in my life before.'" Then, after another pause, "Well, Mrs. Snaith, you can only be asking me this as a protection to yourself. I promise you."

"Thank you, sir. And Mr. Amias — I should be very deeply obliged to you if you would tell all this to him."

"How should we ever see you with the man?" exclaimed Felix.

"But if you do, sir?"

"Yes — well, I will do it. Mr. Amias shall know. But is there nothing else, that seems more reasonable, that I can help you in?"

"No, sir, thank you kindly. I do not want for money. Sir, will you let me wish you good-night? I am later than I meant to be."

"But, my friend," said Felix, "you left us in a hurry, and my uncle, Sir Samuel, would now gladly give you a handsome sum for information as to the parentage of the two girls."

"Sir, I always say alike. They have no claim on him whatever. I trust you'll let me go."

"No claim?"

"No, sir, none."

Felix put out his hand. "God bless you, my poor friend, and comfort you!" he said. Then he turned back the same way they had come, that she might see he had no thought of finding out whither she was going.

CHAPTER XXXI.

IT was nearly midnight when Hannah Dill came up the alley toward her humble home, and noticed with alarm a small group of people standing outside the window, and apparently glancing into it. She could see, as she advanced, that a candle was burning inside, and she was struck by the silence of the people, till, just as she joined them, one man whispered to the other, "To think of it!" "Well, I'll always believe there's real saints in the world from this time forrard," answered his fellow; and making way for her as she came straight up to the window, they all quietly passed on. Uzziah was kneeling on the floor, with his hands clasped and his eyes upraised. She could only see the side of his face, but, remembering how they two had parted, she was astonished both at the utterly absorbed expression and the depth of its calm.

"He is not crying to God now," she murmured, half aloud; "he is thinking on Him. I have seen him do that before. Art a murderer, my poor wretched husband, or art a saint? Can a man be both one and the other? It's past my knowledge to give an answer to that. But the Lord have mercy on thee and on me, and take our innocent child to Himself!"

She tapped lightly at the door, and Uzziah, with perfect calmness, rose and opened it to her. He looked at her fixedly, as if he expected her to say something decisive, something important to him; but her strength was spent, and her spirits had fallen again. She went forward, sat down on the rocking-chair, and laying her babe down on her knees, looked at him, and said, "Have you done as I told you? Have you prayed for the death of the child?"

"I seemed to have no power to do it. My prayer had no wings; it would not ascend."

She sat many minutes silent. Then she said. "Aren't you afraid you're making yourself too conspicuous — more easy to find — lecturing and spreading your name about as you do?"

"I have left all that to my patient Judge. I must work now while it is day; when the bitter call comes I must kiss the rod, and be ready."

"I have thought sometimes, since I've been out, that I may have made a blessed mistake, and the thing was not so black as I feared. Don't name it to me, but if it was not the darkest deed a man can do, say so."

"It was, in the eyes of the law."

"What do you mean by that?"

"They made me drunk first, Hannah. I was three-parts drunk; yet when — when I did it —"

"You cannot say, then, what I wanted to hear you say?"

"No."

"You had better take the poor babe, then."

Her arms dropped at her side, and her head sank. Uzziah was only just in time to save the child, when she fell forward, and all his efforts could not save her from a fall and a heavy blow.

Some very bitter and anxious weeks followed. Hannah Dill lying on her bed, took little notice of her husband, or even of her child. She scarcely seemed to care what became of her. She had no heart to recover herself, and her wasted features, faded eyes, and feeble pulse, showed how much she suffered.

"The wages of sin." She was linked with the sinner, and those wages had been paid out also to her. She felt more than the fear that he suffered, for he had gone forth to meet the Avenger — had lain at His feet, and craved His pardon; but the more fully he was able to believe that pardon had been granted, the surer he always felt that in this world his sin was to find him out.

But now the despair of this woman, whom he deeply

loved, was too much for him. She dreaded him; she could not bear him to touch her or her child. He knew this, and knew how she tried to hide it. She perfectly acknowledged to herself that he was a changed character; but though she could command her countenance as to expression, she could not as to hue, and when he approached, or when he accosted her, she would often turn white, even to the lips.

Uzziah felt as if he had not known suffering, or even remorse, before. It was only for a short time that such a man as he could taste of love and joy and domestic peace; they were all gone. He saw himself, as it were, with his wife's eyes, and knew how vile he was. He perceived that the opinion of his fellow-creatures was more to him than that of the just and holy God. He had borne to know that death (God-awarded) was the penalty of his crime, but he shrank from the scorn and detestation which at any moment discovery might bring upon him from his fellows; and he too began to feel that "his punishment was greater than he could bear," and that he scarcely cared what became of him.

It was past midnight, about six weeks after Hannah Dill's brief sight of her children, when, coming home once from a dinner party, Amias de Berenger let himself into his own chambers with a latch-key. The fire, in a comfortable room, very much cumbered with books, had been made up for him, and a reading-lamp was burning near it on a small table.

There were bookcases ranged about his walls, and there were red curtains let down before the windows. The sound of passing vehicles was heard, as well as the general murmur made by the multitudinous noises of London. But as Amias sat, with his feet on the fender, a slight tap roused his attention, and it was repeated several times. He threw up the window and looked out. A man at the same moment had withdrawn from the door, and was looking up. He shrank back when the light fell on his face, but Amias saw that it was his "inspired cobbler," his favorite temperance lecturer, and, won-

dering what the man could want at that time of night, he went down and let him in.

"You want to speak to me?" he asked, as he shut the door of his sitting-room, and moved to Uzziah to sit down.

The "inspired cobbler" made no answer. His face was pale; he looked inexpressibly forlorn. In his best black clothes, Amias had always seen him looking the picture of neatness, as if he had the ambition to hope that he might be taken for a third-rate dissenting minister. Now his hair was wild, his dress disordered, his face pale. He shivered, and as he spread out his hands to the fire, Amias noticed that they were blue with cold, and that his breath came with a series of involuntary sighs.

"Well," exclaimed Amias, when he did not speak, "what is it, man?"

"Sir, I can't speak at your lecture to-morrow."

"You should have let me know before, Mr. Dill. And why cannot you."

"There's two reasons," answered Uzziah, uttering the words with difficulty, as if his sighs almost suffocated him; "and they're both of them as bad as they well can be."

"Indeed! I fear you mean more than you say."

"I mean, first, that I've got down into the slough again. I did not think it could be; but I've fallen. God forgive me! I presumed; I was too sure of myself; and the drink (I was very miserable) — and the drink (I'd been a long way, and had nothing, and was faint) — and the drink was at every street-corner. I passed fifty public-houses, and counted them aloud to keep myself out, but at the fifty-first I went in; and I reeled home, sir, as drunk as ever."

"I am truly sorry for you," was all Amias said.

"Oh, sir, and it took so little to overcome me. I went home to my poor wife; and now the thirst and the longing for it are upon me, and I shall do it again."

"No," answered Amias; "this will go off; you must not despond. But how came you to be so impru-

dent as to walk till you were faint? And what misfortune has made you miserable?" he continued, calling Uzziah's words to mind.

"Oh, I am a miserable man!" was all the reply his "inspired cobbler" made; and he sank upon his knees before the fire, and covered his face with his hands.

"I am truly sorry for you, Dill," repeated Amias, very much shocked. "But the worst thing you can do is to talk in this despairing way. Pluck up courage; be a man. Come, I'll give you something to eat at once; and I'll see you safe into your own home. But I am afraid — yes, I am afraid you cannot speak any more at these meetings, — at least, for a time."

"I cannot eat," answered Uzziah; "but you are good, sir, to say you'll walk home with me. I'm in such mortal fear that I shall be drawn into those man-traps again; they catch body and soul. My head never would stand the half of what another man can take," he moaned. "Oh, why did I do it! — But I know: I longed for it; I kept muttering to myself as I came to you this night, 'Oh for one drop — oh that I could have one drop!' I longed for it more than for the air I breathe."

"Did this come upon you all on a sudden?" asked Amias.

"It came on same time as all the rest of the misery."

"What misery?" asked Amias.

Uzziah started up, seeming to recollect himself; he sat down again, and looked at Amias as if he was trying to collect his thoughts.

"It would not be safe to tell you," he said; and instantly seemed to feel that to have said even that was far too much.

Amias drew his chair slightly further off.

"Yes, sir," said the cobbler, as if answering his thought; "I'm no worse than I always have been since long before the day you first saw me. But you have no call to demean yourself to sit so near. It's more than my wife will do. I thought God, that knew all, had forgiven me; but now it's all dark. — O God, Thou hast taken me up and cast me down."

"You must not despair of the goodness of God. He knows the great temptation the constant sight and smell of drink is to such as you. You will recover yourself soon, I hope, and even, perhaps, may be allowed to speak again in public."

Amias said this because he knew what joy and honor it always seemed to the cobbler to stand forth and utter his testimony. He had a ready flow of words, many anecdotes at his command, and took a simple and harmless pride in his own popularity.

Uzziah shook his head. "My wife says no to that," he answered, sighing; "she says it would be tempting Providence."

Amias again offered him food, and when he would not take it, renewed the offer of walking home with him; and the two men set forth together, Amias feeling sufficient distrust and dislike of his companion to keep him very silent. But what was his astonishment when, having conducted the poor man to his own door, he knocked, determining to see him enter it before he left him, and it was opened by his brother's old servant, Mrs. Snaith — yes, Mrs. Snaith — evidently the mistress of that humble home, and she had a baby in her arms.

He was on the point of addressing her, when he remembered his brother's account of the interview he had lately had with her, and how she had begged that, if either of them met her with her husband, he would not recognize her.

She looked aghast, but almost instantly recovered herself. He checked himself just in time, and as Uzziah passed in, said, as if to a stranger, "Your poor husband has been with me to-night, Mrs. Dill, and I have walked home with him. I am very sorry for him, but I am full of hope that this will soon pass off."

"Will you come in, sir?" answered Mrs. Dill, with entreating eyes.

Amias entered, and Uzziah Dill went straight upstairs, shutting the staircase door behind him.

Mrs. Dill, who had not moved nor spoken again, was standing with the candle in her hand listening, and her

head slightly raised. She now set it down on the small deal table. "He will not come down any more, poor man," she said, almost in a whisper; "he has shut himself in for the night, but whether to pray or to sleep I cannot say. He never seems to have a moment's ease of mind now."

"It is a piteous sight to see his repentance," Amias answered; "but, Mrs. Snaith —"

"Mrs. Dill, sir."

"Yes — Mrs. Dill. You must not let him get morbid; I mean that you should encourage him. He ought not to think that such a fault is past reprieve."

"What fault, sir?" asked Mrs. Dill, with a certain air of fluttered distress. "Oh yes, sir — yes, sir; he was overcome by temptation, and he fell." She trembled now, and looked so faint and frightened, that Amias could not answer at once, he was too much surprised; but when she repeated, "Overcome by temptation, and he fell — that was what you meant," he at once perceived that both husband and wife had more on their minds than a mere drunken fit, and he again experienced the strange revulsion against this man which had impelled him to draw away his chair. He did not like to hear his footsteps overhead.

"Mrs. Dill," he said, leaning towards her as he sat, and speaking in a whisper, "I have thought of that poor man, your husband —"

"Yes, sir; my husband."

"Well, I have thought of him as a saint."

"And so have I, Mr. Amias."

"But you are very much in fear of him?"

"I believe he is a saint, sir."

"I think you ought to answer me. Are you in bodily fear of him?"

"No, sir, I am not. He is perfectly gentle, and a pious Christian, poor creature, when he is sober, and I trust in the mercy of God that he will not drink again. He and I have kneeled down together, and begged and prayed the Lord that he never might so fall again; and I do believe, sir, that we are heard."

"And yet, Mrs. Dill, when you opened the door, if ever I saw a woman's face express mortal fear, yours was that face."

Mrs. Dill said nothing.

"It is only a few days, is it, since this took place — since he got drunk?"

"Only a few days."

Amias pondered, and at last said, "I do not like to leave a person whom I have long known and respected in any danger, or in such a state of terror as I found you."

"I was afraid, sir, when I heard the knock, for how should I know that it was you?"

Amias looked at her; the words "You are afraid *for* him, then, not *of* him?" were almost on his lips, but he spared her.

"I don't fare to regard a few pangs of fright, more or less," she presently added, "my life, sir, is so full of misery; but when I saw Mr. de Berenger, and now that I see you, I know what a wide gulf there is betwixt me and that happy life I led, when I went in and out without fear, and lived so quiet and respectable, all comforts about me, and answered the door without any alarm, and — and waited on my dear young ladies."

She could not possibly forbear to speak of her children, so sore was her longing to hear of their welfare. Amias, who took her mention of them chiefly as a proof, among others, of her regrets for her old occupation and the old place, felt as if desire to talk of them was all his own. A glow came into his dark cheek, and a flash into his eyes. It became evident to him that he ought to indulge himself — their old nurse naturally wished to hear about them — and almost with reverence the lover allowed himself the delightful privilege of uttering Amabel's name.

He was fully occupied now with his own feelings, or he could not have failed to notice how the waxen pallor of the nurse's face gave way to rose color, and how her expression became first peaceful, then almost rapturous. She turned her eyes away from him, and scarcely asked

a question, and she also was too full of her own feelings to notice his.

She tried to keep her gladness moderate, and to hear of their welfare, improvement, and beauty with as much seeming calm as he tried to give to his words in telling of them. If a third person had been present this attempt would, on both sides, have been equally vain. Amias ended with, "And I often hear them speak of their dear old nurse, and wish they had her again."

Then the nurse lifted up her hand, and looked up. "Bless their sweet hearts!" she said with impassioned tenderness. "I love them, but I pray the Lord in His great mercy to keep them and me always apart."

Amias was very much struck by this speech, and by her earnestness. "I was almost thinking, Mrs. Snaith, that I could, perhaps, bring them to see you," he exclaimed.

"This is no place for them to come to," she interrupted.

"And you do not wish to see your young ladies?"

"No, sir; I pray you to keep them away."

The clock of a neighboring church struck one. Amias rose.

"Some things you say make me very uneasy," he began.

"Sir, you have no call to be afraid for me," she repeated, interrupting him again.

"Do you know my address?"

"Yes, sir."

"If ever you should want help, come, or write to me."

"I will, and I am truly thankful for your kindness but I want nothing so much as this, that, if we meet, you should make as if you did not know me."

"I shall remember."

"And I would fain, if I might, send my love to my dear young ladies."

Her love, which she was so desirous not to reveal, so as to excite his suspicions and his love, which, unless he kept it hidden, got the mastery over his calm, made them both so self-conscious and restrained, that again

neither could notice the other, and Amabel's mother and her lover parted strangers, in spite of what might have been so mighty a link between them.

Hannah Dill had at last recovered her health, and begun to take in hand her husband's affairs. He had lost energy and hope since he had again fallen under the influence of drink, but after he had seemed to become like himself, and had begun to eat and to work again, he was a second time drawn into a gin-palace, and then, when the next day he was lying in despair on his bed, racked with headache, and almost beside himself with remorse, she came up to him and deliberately proposed that she should lock him up — lock him in to that little whitewashed garret, bring him his food and his work, supply him with coal and candle, and not let him out till she thought he was safe.

He accepted her proposal thankfully, and it spoke well for his sincerity that he armed her against himself, his own probable entreaties or commands, by giving her a paper, desiring her to use her best judgment, and show no false mercy by letting him out till she was satisfied of his cure. He signed it, and she kept him locked in for three weeks. But he was used to confinement — that did him no harm; he was accustomed to the companionship of accusing thoughts and wretched memories. She took these things into account, and did not let them influence her; but there was one thing she did not take into account, and this was his strong, absorbing love for herself.

She brought him his meals, she swept out his room, she took care that he had candlelight, and all such comforts as their slender means would permit; but when she had done all such obvious tasks, she did not sit with him, or linger to chat, or bring the child and lay it on its father's bed, while she worked. No, nothing of this kind; when she had waited on him, she went down again.

Uzziah felt this, and he found nothing to say. Every day he thought he must and would open a conversation with her, if it was only to ask a few harmless, common-

place questions, such as, "Have you been to the shop, Hannah? Well, sit you down and tell me about it." "Got the baby a new hat, did you? Bring up the little chap and let me see him in it." He rehearsed many such questions and remarks with himself when alone; but when he heard his wife's step on the stair, and heard her turn the key, he never could utter them. She always found him silent, and every morning she made him the same apology, "Wishing you better, my poor husband, and feeling it hard I should have to take away your liberty."

"I don't feel as much better as I could wish," was often the answer. "I'm parched with thirst, and long for liquor;" but he could not add, "and I long for your company."

And she was only able to talk with him on the matter in hand — what he thought it might be best for him to eat, and what to drink. When she had done and said all, she would turn away very quietly, almost slowly, and close and lock the door again; but then he used to hear her run downstairs, as if it was a deep relief to get away from him.

And so it was.

At last one day he said, "Hannah, I've no longing at all upon me now for liquor, and I bless the Lord for that."

"Well, and I bless the Lord for it, too," she answered, almost cordially.

She observed that he had put on his best clothes, and brushed his hair.

"I feel as if I might go out," he said. "Only, what do you think, my poor wife? Am I fit to go alone?"

"I'll go with you," she answered; and his whole appearance changed. She could not but feel a pang of pity for him, for his face was so like what her heart had felt when she had last seen her lovely children. Her proposing of her own accord to go out with him was such a cordial, and yet he knew it was only as a guardian that she was to go. She would be near to help him out of mischief and temptation — as a duty, and not a pleasure.

"And where do you want to go?" she inquired.

"Well, Hannah, first I must look for work; for what I used to earn by my efforts for the temperance cause, I have lost now."

"Too true," she replied.

"And, second, I must go to Mr. de Berenger. He will wonder what has become of me all this time. I want to say to him what you have to hear first."

He saw then the sudden pallor which often distressed him in his wife's face, and did not know that her fear of meeting with Amias was what had brought it on, not of what he might have to say.

"If you're agreeable to it, my dear, I feel as if I had better go away from London. I might find a country place — I seem to know of several — where there are not any public-houses tempting one at every turn. I could not keep *us* quite as well as I have done, but I would do my best."

He paused, and looked at her earnestly, and she answered what she knew was in his mind.

"Yes, Uzziah, I would go with you."

CHAPTER XXXII.

AMIAS was standing on the rug in the room where he had talked with Uzziah Dill. It was a pleasant morning; the red curtains of the windows had been partly drawn, and shafts of sunshine came in between, casting a fine glow upon the figures of an old man and an elderly lady, who sat on two comfortable chairs.

"Yes, my dear uncle is much disappointed," said Sarah. "He thinks the little girls look thin and weakly. Yes! and dear Amabel and my pretty Delia —"

"Why mention them in the same breath with the others?" interrupted Amias. "My uncle, I understood, was come here to talk over his affairs, — express some of his wishes as regards his granddaughters."

"And dear Amabel and my pretty Delia," Sarah went on, as if she had not heard him, "have each had an offer of marriage. Yes, very natural, I am sure, and does the young men no special credit."

The dark cheek of Amias mustered color, and his eyes flashed. Sir Samuel, in spite of a little depression which showed itself in his air, smiled furtively here.

"No special credit," she went on, "for anybody might see, with half an eye, what charming, desirable girls they are — though, to be sure, the lovers, both in the army, had nothing at all but their pay. However, as they said to me, there's always hope of a scrimmage. War, war, — that's what they all look to, what they daily pray for. But it's rather shocking to think of their dropping on their knees — whole rows of them — and deliberately entreating a merciful Providence to send 'battle, and murder, and sudden death,' that they

may get their promotion! Yes; but that's what, as I'm informed, they always do."

Sir Samuel sat through this speech in silence, and, as he still said nothing, Sarah spoke again.

"Some girls are far too rich," she observed, "and others far too poor. It would be much better if my dear uncle would have his six granddaughters as before. Punctilios are quite out of place in family matters; and you are so particular, Amias, about your rubbishing proofs, that now you see the consequences. The property, as my dear uncle has said, must go to those four pale-eyed, sickly girls (not the least like the family), and their fortunes will be so large, that they will be the victims of all the neediest scamps out."

"I am not so sure of that," said Amias, "if Felix is to have the charge of them, and I am to be their guardian."

"Much too rich, poor children! But when my will comes to be investigated, perhaps it may be found that I have been less regardless of the family interests than you have, and have not thrown dear John's children over just because he died before he could come home to claim them,—and produce his marriage certificate," she added, after a short pause, "which he had no reason to suppose we should ever think of asking for."

"If you please, sir," said a servant, entering, "Mr. Uzziah Dill wishes to speak with you."

"I will see him in a few minutes," replied Amias. "Now, aunt," he continued, when the door was shut, "you have been giving me rather a long lecture this morning."

"Well, perhaps I have," she answered, looking up at him affectionately, "and I must say you have borne it like a lamb. Yes! but it will have no effect upon you, Amias."

"You accuse me, among other things, of meddling in the affairs of this world, of a strong wish to make it better and happier. Now, there is a poor, weak wretch of a lame cobbler downstairs—"

"Yes! going to prove that my remarks were so much wasted breath."

Amias turned from his aunt to his uncle. "I say, uncle, that I feel a wish just now to see the world — at least, those few atoms of it which are held together by the body of that lame cobbler — a little better and a little happier."

"Then there's money ir the wish," said Sir Samuel, smiling rather grimly. "By how much money is the little dèmagogue to be made better and happier? I remember him. I heard him rant when you were at the seaside, a year or two ago."

"I think five and twenty pounds would satisfy me."

Sir Samuel lifted his eyebrows involuntarily, he was so much astonished at the audacity of Amias in naming so large a sum. "This comes," he thought, of my having laid myself under an obligation to him by making him my girls' guardian."

"The poor man's case is hard, and I deeply pity him," continued Amias. "He was a reformed drunkard, and kept himself sober for years; but in a time of deep distress — an illness of his wife's, I think — he was overcome by temptation, and drank again. Now he almost despairs, and his living is lost, for of course he cannot rant, as you call it, on temperance any more."

Partly in gratitude to Amias, but more in pity for the man, Sir Samuel took out his purse, and, to the surprise of Sarah, gave Amias, in gold and notes, the five and twenty pounds.

Amias, thanking him, took the money and went into a little waiting-room, where he found poor Dill and his wife. Uzziah looked the shadow of his former self, and was very desponding.

Amias applauded him for his intention of leaving London, held out no hope that any more temperance lecturing was possible for him, but gave Mrs. Dill the money, and said it was a generous gift from a friend.

Mrs. Dill accepted it with beautiful and homely dignity. "It was a king's ransom to her," she said; "it would give her husband hope and courage, and that was what he mainly wanted to keep him sober."

She had money, more than this sum, lying in the

hands of Mr. Bartlett, but since a certain dreadful fact had come to her knowledge, she feared the very sight of a lawyer, and had made her husband more timid than herself.

"Then I suppose I've got to retire into private life, sir," said poor Uzziah, in a desponding tone.

Amias with difficulty forbore to smile.

"I am sorry for you, Dill," he began.

"It's a sore blow, but a meet punishment," interrupted the poor man.

"We have taken up enough of Mr. de Berenger's time," said the wife, with gentle firmness. Amias shook hands with her, but not with her husband; and when Uzziah saw that he was determined to say no more, he made his bow, and departed.

He and his wife went and sat down on a bench in Kensington Gardens, for Uzziah was too weak to walk all the way home without a rest, and the Gardens were in their way.

The poor man was very wretched, and his wife understood his misery. He wiped his brow as he seated himself, and spoke for the first time.

"He never gave me the least hope, Hannah; he never even said I might stand forth again at some future time."

She was silent.

"To think I could do good and help the cause was almost what I lived for. It was not only the applause I got, Hannah; you must not think it."

"I do not think it."

"I was buoyed up by it. It enabled me to deny myself."

"Ay, my poor husband; but it made you *forget*."

Uzziah wiped his forehead again.

"Am I to have nothing to do, then, for God?"

"Ay, truly; you've got to get our living by your trade. So far as I can see, that is God's will about you just now, and that it may last His will, I daily pray."

"Then, if I am to go, let it be a long way off. There's plenty of money. Let us go where I may forget."

He spoke weakly and almost peevishly. His wife encouraged him, but from that day she recognized a change. His crime, which it seemed he had almost forgotten, was now ever present to his mind; he had supposed that in the end he should be discovered as its perpetrator, but because he believed that God had forgiven it, he had felt that he was free of it in the mean time.

He now discovered his mistake. No need to tell him to be distant and humble in his manner to his wife, or meek and silent with others; he was all this of his own accord. With a touching patience he undertook such work as he could get, and contented himself with such fare as it would procure.

Hannah Dill could find no consoling words for him; but she forbore from all reproach, and gradually, as he left more and more to her, she took the guidance of him and of their small earnings. In one thing she always yielded. He had sometimes a fit of restlessness, and would long to leave the town or village where they were. Then she would produce Sir Samuel's money, and by some cheap excursion train, and still cheaper steamer, they would go on. It was always in the same direction — always north. At last, after a full year of such wandering, they found themselves at Whitby, and here the change of scene, the cordial manners of the people, and perhaps the fine air of the place, seemed at last to revive the poor man. He settled to his work with more hope, slept better, and would sometimes walk about the shore and into the country, evidently refreshed by the beauty of the scene.

Hannah Dill felt relieved, for she could not but be influenced by the deep depression she always saw in him. Gradually it passed, she scarcely knew when or how. He was very humble, very silent still; many an hour he would spend in prayer, lying on the floor of the little chamber; but at meal times he would now sometimes converse with her, or he would whistle to the child, now grown a fine, rosy little fellow. Sometimes he would read aloud, and always he would work diligently at his calling.

Hannah Dill calmed herself by degrees, and began to live from day to day. She had been long looking for a catastrophe: it did not come. She now began to feel some refreshment in the present. The constant changes of the sea fed her observant mind. Sometimes the harbor would be full of heavy rolling waves, and the tugs and vessels would rock on them like ducks, while the pier lighthouse would be drenched by the breakers that reared at it, and rushed on, hiding it for the moment in a great fountain of seething foam.

Every day she took her child on her arm and walked forth, that he might enjoy the bracing air.

And she could again enjoy it. The sweet life of the rectory was remote as paradise might have been to Eve's imagination when she had left it; but she had another child to love and tend, and she had much ado to make the money cover their small expenses. Then she took in needlework when she could get it, and sometimes did a little clear-starching, so that she had plenty of occupation, and yet not of a sordid kind. They were poor, but there was no grumbling in their home, and though the parents frequently went without meat with their potatoes, there was always a cup of milk for the child.

The year thus spent by Hannah Dill proved a very eventful one for the De Berengers.

Sir Samuel, now eighty years of age, began slightly to lose his memory, and to depend more and more on his niece Sarah and on his two great-nephews. To describe the anguish this caused to his daughter-in-law, Mrs. de Berenger, would be quite impossible. When she heard that Amias had gone to live with the old man, and always attended to his affairs while he was in London, and sat at the head of his table, she was taken ill from sheer anxiety, so likely, it seemed to her, that Amias would influence him to the prejudice of her four children. She wrote to Sarah frequently, and, expressing the deepest solicitude about the old man's health, begged that she would use her influence to get him into the country. He had already given up his seat in parliament, and dis-

posed of his business; how much better it would be for him if he would live in the fresh country air. It was such a needless expense, too, as he saw hardly any company, to have two establishments.

Sarah, showing the letter to Amias, who saw its real meaning, the old man was easily persuaded to go into the country; but there matters were no better. Sir Samuel did not want his daughter-in-law, would not invite her and her children to come to him. He wanted Amias, always Amias; and as he could not have this favorite nephew in the country, he got Felix to come about him as much as the parson nephew would consent to do, and at other times, rather than be alone, he would come and stay at the rectory, contenting himself with the quiet life led there, and paying for himself and his old servant a due proportion of its expenses, and no more.

From week to week, though his mental decay was so slight as to be scarcely perceptible, he seemed to become more conscious of a change in himself, and to be more desirous of guidance; more afraid, especially in money matters, of committing some imprudence, more openly dependent on the opinion of one or other of his two great-nephews; while, at the same time, his spirits improved, and his temper grew sweeter, partly from the absence of all business or political worries, partly from the delightful consciousness of how much money he was saving by living so frequently at the rectory.

His presence was never regarded as a trouble there; quite the contrary. Felix, who had been keenly aware of his foibles some years previously, became now very indulgent to them. From mere sociability of temper, he always liked to have his house full. He was never easy when Amabel and Delia were away; his aunt Sarah's presence had always been a pleasure to him; and now Sir Samuel frequently in and out, riding with the girls, going to sleep in his most comfortable chairs, and conforming to the early hours of the rectory, was decidedly agreeable to him.

If anybody had taken the trouble to observe the fact,

and place it to its true account, Felix must have been held to be changed. He was much more particular in his dress; he was altogether brushed up, and looked better and younger: but his temper was not quite so indolently gentle as it had been, and he was sometimes a little unfriendly toward a certain young officer in the army, who frequently rode over to the rectory about this time, and would turn very red, and half choke himself with sighing, whenever Delia condescended to look at him or to speak to him.

Delia thought this young man a great bore, for a certain instinct of propriety made her aware that, as she did not mean to let him get friendly and intimate — as she would not let him help to feed her young ducks, or knock down the sweetest crab-apples for her, or beat the donkey when she indulged in a canter — she must, therefore, take the trouble to smooth her wandering locks for him, and treat him to her best frock. She never gave him a smile, but then she took care that her sash was not awry.

Nothing, however, could repress the gallant soldier's love, and one afternoon, when Delia was out — gone out riding with her sister and old Sir Samuel — he laid his modest prospects before Felix, together with his manly hopes, and begged leave to make his offer in due form.

It was his last hour in the neighborhood; his leave was up. Felix was perfectly sure that Delia cared nothing at all about him, but he consented to lay the matter before his ward; and when the two girls returned, rosy and beautiful, from their ride, he called her into his study.

Felix was seated on his sofa. He had seldom in his life looked so well. Delia looked at him, and thought so. There was more fire in his dark eyes than usual; there was even a shade of red under the dark cheek. He began quietly to state the soldier's wishes.

"What a goose he is!" said Delia, when the story had been told.

Felix was gratified. He would have liked to rise and

set a chair for Delia, but this would have been such an unwonted proceeding, that it must have roused her attention, and for the present he did not dare to do that; he wanted to let things drift.

"Was he very droll, Coz?" she next inquired.

"Droll!" exclaimed Felix; "droll, poor fellow! No. Why?"

Delia was standing before him, with her whip in her hand; she was twisting round it a long bine of wild briony that she had gathered in the hedge. "Oh, because you look so — so amused. I don't like you to look pleased."

Felix could not help looking pleased.

"Why?" he inquired, almost faintly.

Delia made no answer for the moment. She seemed to cogitate; then she said, in a pleading tone, "I suppose I'm not obliged to try to like him, Coz, if I don't wish?"

"Certainly not," replied Felix.

Delia came and sat down beside him next, and she blushed, and seemed to look inquiringly at him. So sweet a hope had never dawned in the heart of Felix in all his life, as swelled it in that happy moment, but he said not a word.

Then the unreasonable young creature laughed, and shrugged her shoulders. "If you want me to send an answer to him," she said, "you'd better tell me what to say; for, of course, I don't know."

Felix was so sure she did not care for her lover, that he found no difficulty in doing him justice, and in taking care that his suit was duly presented.

"How can I tell what to say, unless I know what you feel?" he inquired.

"I don't feel anything particular," replied Delia — "excepting when he comes," she added.

"And what then?"

"And then I do so wish he would go."

Felix laughed. He felt that the situation was getting the mastery over him. This child of his adoption was so sweet, so familiarly affectionate in her manner towards

him, that he could not but retain his old household ways with her, and yet she did not now give him her good-morning kiss without making him tremble from head to foot. He started up hastily from his seat, and began to pace the room. Delia still occupied her hand with the strand of wild briony, and he looked at her: a beautiful blush went and came on her rounded cheek; it seemed that she could not meet his eyes.

"Delia," he said, stopping opposite to her, and speaking not without some tremblement in his voice, "you must say yourself what I am to repeat to him. You must make a direct answer to his proposal.

"He's so old," said Delia, as if excusing herself for not caring about him.

"Old!" exclaimed Felix, astonished and almost horrified. He felt himself turning chill, and a sudden dimness seemed to becloud all his dearest hopes. "He is only six and twenty," he went on, sitting down and sighing.

"He's much older than Dick," said Delia. "Oh — I would much rather — wait — for Dick."

Felix looked at her earnestly while she spoke; a flood of rosy color covered her fair face and throat. She bent her head a little, and was too much absorbed in her own trouble to notice that Coz was pale.

"Wait for Dick?" repeated Felix, in the quietest of tones.

Delia felt something unusual in it; a certain dulness and dimness made it seem far off. She blushed yet more deeply. "I did not think you would mind," she began.

"Dick is a mere boy," said Felix. "Is it possible that he has spoken already?"

"No, he hasn't yet," answered Delia, excusing him; "but he will soon."

"He will soon?" repeated Felix, between astonishment and dismay, and instantly Delia started up and ran to him. He rose to meet her, and putting her dimpled hand on his shoulder, she sighed out —

"Oh, Coz, don't tell him. I did not mean to say it."

"Never mind, my sweet," he answered, and it seemed as if he was consoling her — "never mind; it cannot be helped."

"But you'll never tell any one?" she entreated, and she laid her cheek for a moment against his.

He answered, "No."

"No, Coz, dearest, don't," she repeated; "and there he is coming." She had caught the sound of Dick's foot outside the door, and, with a mischievous little laugh, she snatched up the train of her habit, and, darting out at the open window, ran to join Sir Samuel, who was sitting under a chestnut tree on a low bench.

She spent the next quarter of an hour in thinking a good deal about her cheeks, now and then laying her dimpled hand upon them, to ascertain whether they were growing cooler.

Felix spent the same time in his study, sitting perfectly motionless and silent. He had wasted his youth on a long, obstinately cherished attachment; it had melted away quite unaware, and for the last few weeks — only a few weeks — a new one had risen, suddenly as a star. Delia was so young. He knew, of course, that at present she felt only a childlike love for him, but he never supposed that she loved any one else; and now she herself had told him that she did, and if he could believe that she knew her own mind, his hope was lost, and his day was over.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LITTLE Peep was dead. Amias wrote a long, affecting account of his last illness to Amabel, how for many alternate nights he and Lord Robert had watched by him, how patient and content he was, and how kind Mr. Tanner had been.

Amabel kissed the letter; it pleased her to think that Amias had such an affectionate heart.

Lord Robert, it seemed, had "broken down" at the funeral. Yes, but Lord Robert had got a fine appointment in one of the colonies; he would sail in a few days with his pretty wife, and soon forget poor little Peep. Amias never would.

Little Peep, in his last will and testament, left several thousand pounds in trust to Amias, to build a temperance public-house, and his portrait was to hang in the bar.

Little Peep was there represented as a young man of average size, and a decidedly intellectual countenance. The temperance lecture that Amias had written appeared in his hand as a folded scroll, and he was coming forward on a platform to read it.

The poor young fellow took much innocent pride in this picture, and the last night of his life, when Lord Robert and Amias were both with him, he told them what he intended to have done with it.

"Some people think it an excellent likeness," he said, faintly. "I enjoy public speaking, and if it had pleased God to prolong my life, I might have made myself a name by it. I might have done something great."

"That you would, dear boy," said Lord Robert; and soon after this he died.

"He had so many endearing qualities," said Amias, speaking to Lord Robert the night after his funeral — "so many endearing qualities — that it was impossible to despise him, and yet I think, on the whole, he was the greatest fool I ever knew."

"He was not by any means the greatest fool *I* ever knew," answered Lord Robert, pointedly, and in a tone of good-natured banter.

"Why, what have I done now?" exclaimed Amias.

"Oh, nothing now; but I do not see why you are to be allowed to go about the country making yourself conspicuous for this temperance cause, without being made to pay for it."

"I have paid," answered Amias. "I paid when I was a boy."

"But I have a fine eye. I observe the march of events. You'll see that poetical justice will be done upon you before long. I don't say that I should not take a certain pleasure in seeing it done."

"What do you mean, Bob?"

"When you took yourself off from your old uncle, he had three sons. They have all died, one after the other, and every year he became more attached to you. Now, there's a great uncertainty about the ways of this world; people don't always do in real life what is expected of them. But if you had been a man in a book, Amias, the old uncle about this time would have done poetical justice upon you; he would have let you know — in fact, he would have said, in the presence of those friends you most liked (would, perhaps, have convened them on purpose to hear it) — that but for your rebellious, unfilial, and unfeeling conduct to him, he would have (leaving a poor fortune to each of his granddaughters) — he would have adopted you, and made you his principal heir."

"Verdict, 'serve me right,'" said Amias.

"The march of events distinctly points to such a catastrophe," continued Lord Robert. "Depend on it, he will say something of the sort before he has done with you."

"Poor old man!" answered Amias. "No, Bob, he never will; he will say nothing of the sort."

"But am I to have these noble aspirations after poetical justice for nothing."

"Time will show."

"If I had been blessed with such an uncle, would I have so treated him? Yes, Amias, I repeat it: little Peep was not the greatest fool *I* ever knew."

A very eventful year followed for the De Berengers, but Hannah Dill, who thought of them unceasingly, never had a hint of anything that concerned them; her darlings, as she often felt, with an almost unbearable pang, might be dead and buried, while she knew nothing of it. But her little son helped her to endure this uncertainty, as he also helped to fill the empty, aching heart.

Her husband had quite, for the time, got over those paroxysms of craving for stimulus; he could trust himself alone about the town, but he never proposed to speak at meetings again, and she did not conceal her opinion that this was best.

But now the last of Sir Samuel's money was spent, and though Uzziah worked hard, his poor earnings did not quite keep them. Several of their best articles of clothing had been sold, yet he could not make up his mind to let his wife write to Mr. Bartlett for the money due to her, so much was he afraid now of bringing himself into undesirable notice.

And yet money was sorely wanted — money for the quarter's rent now nearly due — and, after the only discussion they had held since leaving London, Dill consented to write to Mr. Bartlett, authorizing him to give the money to his wife, and then consented to her going to London, and taking the letter by hand, so as not to betray his whereabout.

With great difficulty, and by the sale of every article that they could possibly spare, they scraped together just enough money to pay for an excursion ticket, and then, some small provision of food tied up in a hand-

kerchief, the husband and wife proceeded to the station, the former carrying his child.

"Keep a good heart," said the wife as she took leave of him; but unaccountable depression weighed down her own heart. She had not an easy moment during the long journey, and she walked to Mr. Bartlett's house full of wretched forebodings.

A pale, faded woman, he scarcely knew her at first, but she soon recalled herself to his mind, and, almost to her own astonishment, she got all the money due to her, with only the little formality of waiting for her husband's signature, which she wrote for and obtained, before she could carry it away.

"And now you have got it," he said to her, with a certain dispassionate curiosity, which was more an interest in the event than in her, the human agent that was to bring it to pass — "now you have got it, Mrs. Hannah Dill, do you mind telling me what you are going to do with it?"

"Why, take it to my poor husband, sir."

"Oh!" was all he answered; but he looked at her in a way that suggested both surprise and incredulity. "I only asked you as a friend," he observed. "Of course it does not matter to me what you do. I am perfectly safe."

"Yes, sir; but what else should you think I would do?"

"Should I think?" he repeated. "Well, I may have thought you would go on as you began."

"Sir, in the other case I only acted against Dill, to save, if I could, his poor children; not to save myself."

"And this poor child?"

"I fare to think he cannot be saved, sir," she answered, melting into tears. "His father sets that store by him that I could not be so cruel as to carry him off."

"Well, well, Mrs. Dill," he answered, "it is no business of mine — none at all."

"I was never treacherous to him," she interrupted "I never said to him that former time, 'Dill, I am off

to get our money. Keep a good heart; I am coming home as soon as I can.'"

"And you did say so this time?"

"Certainly."

"Well, Mrs. Dill, I am truly sorry for you."

His voice was rather kind, but his manner suggested all manner of doubts to her — doubts as to what she really meant to do, and doubts whether, knowing what she meant to do, she was wise; but she had hardly reached her humble lodging, before she became calm and assured again. She had promised her poor husband that she would go back to him, and go she would.

But, oh! with what fear she returned; with what crowding, unfortunate presentiments! What they meant she could not tell, but she never lost them for a moment till she stopped at Whitby Station, and saw her landlady waiting to meet her, and smiling in cordial, pleasant fashion, as she stepped up to the carriage door.

"Dill was off to a little hamlet some miles off," she explained, "and would not be back till the next day. A poor man, whom he sometimes went to read to, was near his end, and had just sent to beg that he would sit up with him that night and pray with him."

"And Dill is all right?" asked the wife.

"As right as can be," was the answer.

Where now were all her fears?

She was so wearied and exhausted with what she had gone through, that her knees shook and her head ached. The relief was great of finding her superstition, as she now called it, unjustified by any reasonable cause, yet she could not settle to any work. What she had gone through is by no means a rare experience; it had been a restless sense of conscious danger or of deep need, weighing down the spirit of her husband, and having power to affect her, making her a partaker of his misery, without imparting to her the cause. She knew she should not be quite at ease till she had seen Uzziah, and she wanted to pass away the time, so as soon as she had taken something to eat, she dressed her boy in his best, and went forth among the visitors to the pier that

forms one side of the harbor. She had been so deeply brooding over her own thoughts, that during the journey she had hardly noted anything that passed around her. Now her eyes wandered with conscious refreshment, and her ears were thankful and attentive; all that passed helped to fill her mind with fresh images. Two old fishermen were coiling ropes close to her seat. "Ay, ay," quoth one to the other, speaking with deep pity of the visitors, "there they was, dawdling about, poor souls; nought to do but listen to the pestilent music tootle-tooing, fit to drive 'em distracted. Folks should be piped to their work, and not to their play."

"What's a lugger?" some boy coming up asked the other fisherman.

His companion quietly went on with his business, while he answered, in his broad dialect and soft, persuasive voice, "What's a lugger? Why, that's one; her that has a small mizzen and lug sail on it."

"Won't her masts come out?" asked a still younger boy.

"Ay, for sure; they have kin' o' steps in the boat for to rest 'em on — yo' can see 'em. They make the foremast rake a vast. Now, mebbe yo' doon't see what that's fur."

Neither of the urchins pretended that he did see.

He continued, "It's to give the wind more power, so's to lift the sail — git under it like; and so, if she's heavy laden wi' fish, to lift her at the bows moor out o' t' watter."

This valuable information was given with conscientious care: in his deep pity for these poor children of the land, the old seaman would neglect no opportunity, but do his manifest duty towards them, which was to put the A B C of shipping life (and what other life is worth the name?) plainly before them.

Mrs. Dill looked at their rosy faces with interest. A great many little boys are brought up by old fishermen to take to the water. A few quaint phrases stick in their minds. The loss of that one lifeboat, the Whitby lifeboat, has alone caused many youths to risk their

lives, for danger that ends in death has a fearful attractiveness; it draws the island children out, quite as strongly as that which is surmounted and comes safe home again.

"Ay, t' harbor dues are high," she next heard on her other side. "What do they come to? Why, nigh upon sixpence a ton!"

"Oh!" said the lady who had inquired. "Then, how much will that ship pay?" indicating a vessel with her finger.

"That collier schooner?" asked the fisherman, with genuine pity in his air. "She's not a ship at all, mem. Well, mebbe eighteen shillings. Folks say t' new dues keep out t' vessels. But I doon't complain; when God shuts one door, He mostly opens another. There's less shipping, but there's moor fish. — Who pays for t' lights? Why, every vessel that passes Whitby lights has to pay a halfpenny."

"All those vessels out there? Why, surely it's not worth while to send out to them for only a halfpenny?"

The old fisherman straightened himself up when he heard this, and looked at his mate, as if he would have him testify that the words had truly been said.

"The vessels pay wheer they start from — say Hull. You've heerd talk of Hull?" he then replied, doubtfully.

"Why, of course!"

"Oh, I wasn't sure. Hull, or Sunderland, or wheer not."

"Your boat's ready now, mem," said the second old man.

"Take extry care on 'em, mate," whispered his fellow, with something like contempt; "for they're real landlubbers, and no mistake. And her, the mother of a family, too, to know nothing more than the babe unborn!"

"Bless you," replied his companion, "what should she know of *dues*, nor what's reasonable? If yo'll me believe, she asked me las' night whither theer were any difference atwixt a roadsted and a harbor!"

Mrs. Dill smiled, so exquisite was the enjoyment of the old fishermen over this ignorance "in the mother of six." She watched the boys and this rosy-faced parent down to their boat. They were going to fish — at least, they thought so; the old fisherman was going to bait the lines, and they were going to hold them.

It was a still, warm day. A great bulging cloud, black and low, was riding slowly up from the south. The cliffs had gone into the brooding darkness of this cloud, which had stooped to take them in. The water was spotted with flights of thistledown, floated from the meadows behind the church, and riding out to sea. Suddenly a hole was blown in the advancing and lowering cloud; the sun glared through it, and all the water where his light fell was green as grass, and the black hulls of the crowded vessels glittered; while under the cliff a long reach of peaked red roofs looked warmer and more homelike than ever, and on the top of them the wide old church seemed to crouch, like a great sea-beast at rest, and the ruined abbey, well up on the hill, stood gaunt and pale, like the skeleton ribs and arms of a dead thing in sore need of burial.

So Mrs. Dill thought; but then she was not cultivated enough to love death and decay. She felt the weird gloom of the cloud and the blackness of the nearer water; something of its gloom came over her also; the short respite that change had brought was over. A weight fell down upon her; the peculiar instinct of coming sorrow was upon her again. A step was drawing near rather slowly. She knew it, and a more than common pang of pity shot through her heart; it included her husband and herself, and the child: while seated on her knee the little fellow held up his arms and babbled, "Daddy, daddy!"

Hannah Dill looked up at her husband, and at the moment was too much struck by his appearance to speak. His eyes were not absolutely looking at her, though, a little wider open than usual, they seemed to take in the whole scene — the lowering cloud, the grass-green sea, the rocking boats, and herself and her child.

Was it the arrest of some great surprise that held him motionless? That could not be all. He was lost in thought, and wonder, and perplexity. There was nothing like fear in his face, but no fear could have made it more utterly pale.

"Uzziah!" she exclaimed, with a sharp cry of terror and suspense. Then, as it seemed, he brought his eyes to look at her, and his lips moved; but he uttered no sound. "Whatever is it? Do speak!" she said, faintly.

And in a low, mumbling tone, he said slowly, "I went to read with Jonah."

"Well?" she cried. That was no answer to her question.

"He's dead," proceeded Uzziah.

"Well?" she repeated, shuddering; for he looked distraught, and it seemed as if his thoughts were still remote. But as he saw the terror in her face he appeared to note it (yet not till he had examined her well with his eyes), and then to rouse himself with a sudden start, and with a violent effort to regain almost his usual manner and voice.

"It looks like a storm coming up," he said, while his wife, trembling and sick at heart, wiped away a few tears.

He was folding up a newspaper in his shaking hand; he now put it in his pocket, and when his child slid from the mother's knee, and toddled toward him, he retreated, saying—

"No! Maybe you'd liefer lead him yourself, Hannah! And I've nothing to say against it."

She rose then. There was something wrong, and she did not dare to hear it, or ask what it was. He preceded her to the house, and she noticed that, his hand in his pocket, he kept hold of the newspaper all the way. Yet when they got home the strange manner was all but gone: he was less pale, more observant; he could even eat. And she was very thankful for a comfortable meal. She ate and drank almost with urgency, for she thought there must be something terrible for her

to hear, and that she would fortify herself for it beforehand. Something, she thought, was impending, but nothing occurred. As soon as he had eaten, he told her he was going out to the shore to pray, and he did not return till ten at night.

"I am not going to bed this night," was all he said, when she, weary with her journey, roused herself up to let him in.

She went up to bed, and while she undressed, heard him as he sighed to God, and afterwards heard the same sighing in her dreams; but she was greatly wearied, and when at last she woke, in full daylight, and all the splendor of an August morning, it startled her to find that there was silence below at last.

She stole downstairs. Her husband, dressed in all his best clothes, had opened the window, and was sitting with his head leaning on the sill, fast asleep. He looked exhausted, and she thought he must be going to be ill. He had not treated himself to a holiday for many months. As he had said nothing, there could, she now thought, be nothing to say; he must and should have a day on the heather, and breathe the air from the hills. She went out quietly, bought some fish for breakfast, made the fire, and dressed the child.

It was not till past eight o'clock that he woke, and she called him to his breakfast, and laid her plan before him. Oh how gentle and quiet he was! How little was left of the husband of her youth! He was to see what money she had brought. Yes, he would. He was to rouse himself up. He would try. He was to go with her and the child in the railway to a place he had loved the previous summer, and they were to sit together on the hills. Yes — so best. She began to get alarmed again. as she saw how quietly he sat while she made her simple preparations.

And they went. They stopped a few miles out of Whitby, at a station called Gothland, between two great expanses of heather. They climbed the steep, cliff-like hill on the left-hand side, and reached a long expanse, all purple and gold; a lovely, peaceful view

spread itself forth in successive descents at their feet. The place was remote from life, and yet it was not lonely, for every valley, as it lay open for inspection, had its own farmhouse, and on every space of grass kine were feeding.

What peace appeared to rest as a presence over the purple moor! The child was happy with his flowers; the mother sat quietly looking about her, and feeling thankful for the rest. She thought change might have done her poor husband good. He had eaten, and was wandering hither and thither. She watched him awhile; then her eyes were attracted to a steep declivity, down which a sparkling beck was leaping. In the vale, where it spread itself out into a shallow, lonely pool, a crowd of rooks walked on the moss in companies, and a flock of little finches washed themselves sportively. She was still tired. Her eyes rested on these careless creatures with a dull contentment that was almost pleasure.

She had forgotten her husband for the moment. Where was he? Wandering about in the heather, most likely. Not at hand, for she turned and could not see him. And what was this? Close where he had been sitting, and almost under her hand, he had spread out his handkerchief, and laid upon it most of the money she had given him in the morning. It was all in gold. Her heart sank. Why had he done this? She counted it. He had taken with him seven pounds. She looked about her again, and at last there he was, descending the steep path toward the station. He was half a mile off, and before she could decide what to do, a train came up and stopped. The lame man's figure was visible, running hard to reach the little lonely station. He was the only passenger. She stood up in her place; she saw that he was in time, that the train went on, and that he was gone.

Very few trains stopped there.

It was evening when Hannah Dill and her child got home. Her husband was not there; she had scarcely expected it would be so. Where, then, was he gone? She looked about her, and saw her husband's everyday

coat hanging behind the door. She took it down with a trembling hand. She was always looking for evil tidings, and however heavy the blow might be that fell on her then, it was not a shock, it was hardly a surprise.

A south-country newspaper was in the pocket. Her eyes ran down the columns. She felt, before she saw, what it was that concerned her. The assizes were going on. The judge would be at a certain town that was named, on such and such days. There were several important trials, and one — Hannah Dill cried out, and flung the paper down and wrung her hands. She saw a name that she knew, the name of a murdered man. Some of the details of the crime were given; she remembered them. The murderer was found, it appeared, and was about to be tried.

She quieted herself with difficulty. This could not concern her, then? And yet her terror all concentrated itself upon those assizes. The paper had been read and re-read and wept over; it was still limp with tears. She must go down to this town in the south-west. It was not far from the place where her little Delia had been born. Her husband had been tried there. She should die if she remained in ignorance. Why did she think he had gone there? She could not tell; but she must go, and if her husband did not prove to be there, she was a happier woman than she feared.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A FEW days after this, Mrs. Snep, as she stood ironing in her little cottage by the hop-garden, saw a respectable-looking woman standing by her gate. A stout little boy held her by the hand, and was crying lustily.

Mrs. Snep did not recognize her. It was now seventeen years since a tall, gaunt young woman had craved admittance there. The young woman was forgotten, but she could not forget. There was the little path, and there were the very clumps of pinks, and the gray bushes of southernwood, and there was the mistress of the mansion, stouter, and, as she thought, kindlier-looking than before.

Mrs. Snep came out, and as she threw an article of clothing, just ironed, on a bush to air in the morning sun, she cast an observant eye on the stranger, who, coming forward, begged to ask for a seat until the carrier should appear, and begged to know if she might have a slice of bread and some milk for her child. She had not been able to give him his usual breakfast, and he was cross, and tired too, for they had been travelling all night.

The stranger had a shilling in her hand, and expressed her willingness to pay for what she had, so she was soon made welcome to a seat in the cottage. Some tea was made for her, and while she crumbled bread into a saucer for her boy, and poured milk upon it, a tide of recollections flowed up. She remembered the days before her little Delia was born, and afterwards all that she had suffered. Just so, in that same place, and perhaps in that very chair, her little Amabel had

sat beside her, contented with her bread and milk. The click of Mrs. Snep's iron appeared familiar; the hops leaned over the little back window, just as in the former days.

"And so you want to go on by the carrier's cart?" said Mrs. Snep. "It does not pass till noon."

"I know that, ma'am; I have been the journey before."

"Oh, you know these parts, ma'am?"

"I did a good many years ago."

"Well, things don't change here much, that's certain. We've got the same squire, and the same doctor, and the same parson we've had for years."

"The parson's name was Mr. de Berenger," faltered Mrs. Dill, "when I knew these parts."

"Oh, he was the curate. We have no curate now," answered Mrs. Snep.

"Indeed, ma'am."

"He must have been gone these fifteen years."

"And well-nigh forgot by this time, I should judge," sighed Mrs. Dill, for an anguish of desire urged her to speak of him if she could; he stood so near to her darlings.

"Forgot!" exclaimed Mrs. Snep; "not by any means, I can tell you, ma'am. It's only two years since he came to stay at the vicarage; and I've reason enough to remember that, for my daughter — my second one, that will be three and twenty if she lives till Michaelmas — Mary— "

"Yes?" exclaimed Mrs. Dill, with keen interest.

Mrs. Snep paused to take another iron from the fire, then, attacking her narrative at a different point, said, "Miss Sarah de Berenger, and aunt to that Mr. de Berenger, had wrote to our vicar's lady while he was here, and said she wanted a parlor-maid; and she wanted one from a distance, for she could not allow followers. And so our vicar's lady and Mr. de Berenger managed the thing between them. And Mary took the place, worse luck!"

"Why, I know Miss de Berenger quite well, ma'am!"

exclaimed Mrs. Dill, a warm flush of joy passing over her face. "I lived in a situation for many years within four miles of her."

"No, you don't say so, ma'am! She was the nearest woman, and the meanest, that ever I had to do with, as you'll judge, when I tell you that I'm ironing my girl's clothes for her next place, and there's not a scrap of black among them."

"Black!" faltered Mrs. Dill. "Why, who's dead?"

"Who should be dead, ma'am? Why, Miss de Berenger herself. Didn't you know it?"

"Dear me, no. I am come a long way; I've heard nothing. She was in the best of health when last I heard of her."

"And might be now. It was an accident that killed her. The old gentleman, that used to be so rich, was driving her out, poor lady, and they got overturned. She never spoke again, my girl says. Ah, there have been many changes in that family; it's as much as there often is in the newspapers to read of them. Perhaps you knew the old gentleman?"

"I've seen him times out of mind, ma'am," faltered the poor mother. She dared not now mention her children. Had those changes affected them?

"They say," proceeded Mrs. Snep, "that of all his fine houses and lands, he have but enough left just to keep him."

"Why, I never heard of such a thing," cried Mrs. Dill. "I did not fare to think rich folks like that could lose their property."

"It was a company he had shares in that has done it for him, my daughter said. All the country rang with it. It arose from what people call unlimited liability. There are two pretty young ladies, that folks do say are his granddaughters. You've seen them too, mayhap. He likes to ride about what used to be his own park with them, and he's as happy as a king."

The mother sighed for joy; she could not speak. Her children were among the living, then, and they were well.

The operation of sprinkling the clothes occupied Mrs. Snep for a minute or two, and gave Hannah Dill time to recover herself. "Rides about with Miss Amabel and Miss Delia, does he?" she presently found voice enough to say.

"Their very names, ma'am; you have them quite pat."

"But I should have thought to lose his money would break his heart."

"It does not, ma'am. My daughter stayed at the rectory for three months, after Miss de Berenger's death. They wanted extra help, and paid her handsome. They are better off now, of course. She said it was as good as a printed book to see how the old gentleman went on. He is upward of eighty, and has lost his memory, but I should judge he must be a little childish too. He has no servant left but one old man, that always wait on him, and he has a fat old horse in the rectory stable. He lives with Mr. de Berenger, and does not know that he has lost his money. His notion is that he is making his great fortune greater. Saving up, you know, to leave more behind him."

"He never could bear to spend much money," observed Mrs. Dill. "And so the young ladies ride with him, and are attentive to him?"

"So I hear, ma'am. And what he costs Mr. de Berenger, he has about enough money left to pay for. When he gets tired of the country, my daughter says they put him in the train and telegraph to his other nephew, that lives in London, to meet him. And that's what he does, and takes him home, and there the old gentleman plays the same game. It's not worth while, he says, to have a town house, and that is why he has let it, for he wants to save. He says he must go and see that the people his house is let to are taking care of it. And those folks are so regardful and kind, knowing the case, that they always satisfy him, and, as I said, he is as cheerful and as happy as a king."

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Mrs. Dill.

She was glowing all over with a warmth and joy that

she had hardly ever expected to feel again. Even her miserable errand receded into the background, and made way for the various pictures of her children that had been presented to her. They were well, pretty, useful, happy. Oh, there was sunshine yet in this world, and she was basking in it.

"The Mr. de Berengers are better off now, no doubt?" she presently said, still desirous to prolong the conversation.

"Not by a shilling," replied Mrs. Snep.

"Well, I always hoped, though Miss de Berenger was so fond of making schemes about her will, that she would do the right thing by her nephews."

"Then she didn't, ma'am."

"Who did her money go to, then?"

"She'd almost doubled it during her lifetime, as I heard tell, and they say her house was a sight for the useful things she'd got together — stores of linen, and china, and what not. And she left it all — her farms and her house, and her money — to those two young ladies; everything, down to the very jam-pots on her shelves, and the clothes in her drawers, and the thimbles in her workbox. They say those two young ladies have more than eighteen thousand pounds apiece."

More than eighteen thousand pounds apiece! And the man that had been so good to them — that had brought them up and loved them, and even been proud of them — he had got nothing!

Oh, how sweet it was to hear even this stranger talk of them! But oh, how bitter to hear that the kindness of Felix de Berenger had been so rewarded, and that Sarah, in her obstinate, wilful mistake about them, should have robbed her own flesh and blood for their sake!

Could any good come of money so inherited? No; their mother thought it could not. She became cold and pale. It was not till Mrs. Snep mentioned their names again that she roused herself; but it was only to hear what caused her fresh anxiety, and to be shown that a most difficult, a most bitter, duty towards her darlings was yet to do.

"One of the two is engaged to be married, as I'm told," said Mrs. Snep.

"It must be the eldest, then," said Mrs. Dill, trembling with excitement, and the surprise of thus collecting information about her darlings.

"Well, now, I should have said not."

"But the other is so very young."

"I know there was a young soldier-officer that made one of them an offer. He went away, and came back lately and offered to her again. I think he is the gentleman, and I think it is the youngest. But they're thoughtless — the young ladies are both thoughtless," continued Mrs. Snep, going off on a part of the subject more interesting to her than Delia's lover. "As I said, Miss de Berenger never left so much as one black gown apiece to her servants, though some of them had lived with her for years. Those young ladies were kind — I will say that; but neither of them had the thought to put the servants into mourning, and my daughter came home to me without a scrap of black upon her."

"Somebody did ought to have told the young ladies what was the custom," said the mother, apologizing for them.

"So I say, ma'am."

"Oh, my Delia!" thought Hannah Dill; "do you love this young gentleman? And must your mother go and tell you that you've no right at all to keep Miss Sarah's money. When will there be an end to my sorrows? Maybe the young man will be off the bargain if you give up the fortune; and if you refuse to do so, your mother'll never have an easy hour about you any more."

And what was the true state of the case about Delia? This. That the young officer had, indeed, returned at the end of the year, and had again offered her his hand. Urged by Amabel to give him a little time, and not to reject him hastily, Delia had agreed to consider the matter for a few weeks, and to try to like him. She

had failed; and that very morning, while her little brother ate his bread and milk, she had, with many flushes and blushes, a great deal of pity for him, and some shame for herself, contrived to tell him so. He was gone, and just as her mother left the house where she had been born, and met the carrier's cart, Delia darted upstairs to Amabel's room, and stood looking at her sister with blushing discomfiture.

Amabel came up to her and smoothed her cheek gently against hers — a kind of moderate caress that the girls had used from their childhood.

"What a goose you are, Delia!" she said.

"Yes, I know," said Delia, ruefully.

"You've sent him away."

"Of course: Coz said I must. I wish — oh, I wish *Coz didn't know!*"

"He'll never tell!" exclaimed Amabel.

"No; but I know that he knows."

Delia moved to the dressing-table, and in an absent and agitated fashion began to try on some of Amabel's rings. Presently she saw Dick in the garden; he was apparently deep in thought. Delia drew backward in the room and smiled.

"Coz and Amias have been talking to him all the morning," whispered Amabel. "He says now he should like to go to sea," she continued, nodding towards Dick.

"Does he?" exclaimed Delia. "Oh no, Dick; I think you'll find you do *not* wish to go to sea."

"Then you should not have set him against emigrating."

It may have fairly been said of Master Dick at that time, that he did not know his own mind, unless it may have been said more fairly still that he did not know somebody else's mind, any more than he knew how completely that mind had the mastery over his.

Sir Samuel de Berenger had put him to school till he was eighteen years old, and then, when he came home for the holidays, his two brothers had sat in judgment on him and his future; when it was found that he had done so very well, and stood so very high, that if they

let him stay at school another year, he would in all probability get a good exhibition, which would enable him to go to college almost for nothing, after which he would be able to provide for his own living.

And Dick had come home without getting the exhibition. He was now nineteen, a remarkably fine, handsome young fellow, brown all over, taller than either of his two brothers, very engaging, rather inclined to be idle, and quite helpless in the hands of these said brothers, who had, at some inconvenience to themselves, prolonged his school days for him, and now did not very well know what to do with him.

Dick had only been in the garden a few minutes when he saw Delia sitting in the open window of what had been the nursery, with some "art needlework" in her hand.

"How nice this room looks, with poor Aunt Sarah's things in it!" he said, accosting her and sitting on the window-sill. "No one would know it.—I say, Delia!"

"Yes."

"I've had such a wigging this morning."

"Oh! you should decide, then, what you'll do—what you'll be."

"Well, I said I would go to sea, and they won't let me. Why, Delia, where did you get those rings?"

"Oh, they belong to Amabel. I'm so fond of rings, and I have not got one."

"Why don't you buy some, then?" said Dick.

"Amabel never bought one of hers; rings are supposed to be presents. If I wore rings, and was asked who gave them to me, I shouldn't like to have to say I bought them."

Dick revolved a certain thing in his mind. "Look here," he began; "if I go to sea for two or three years—"

"It will be so dull," interrupted Delia, "if you go to sea and Amabel's gone."

"Well, but if I do, I could give you a ring for a parting present."

"So you could; and I could give one to you, with your crest on it."

"If I go to sea." No occasion to wait for that. Dick took himself off in less than five minutes, and in hot haste demanded of Felix a large, old-fashioned gold watch, which had been his father's, and which he had knocked about a good deal at school.

It had plenty of good stuff in it. Felix looked at him almost as if he knew all about it, and gave him the watch in silence and with gravity.

It was four miles to the town, and Dick ran almost all the way. He did not make a bad bargain with the one jeweller that the place afforded, and then the price he was to have for his watch being agreed upon, he set himself to overhaul the whole shop for two pretty rings. It never once occurred to him that it was odd he should be desirous to lay out his whole fortune on a fancy of Delia's — he never considered once what his brother would say to it if he knew; and yet when he got home, though he had the two tiny cases in his waistcoat pocket, and opportunities were not wanting for the presentation, he could not give them to her. It was not till the next morning, about the same hour, that he saw Delia sitting in the same place, all over blushes and dimples. He approached, and getting over the low sill, sat down beside her on the couch, and said, "I've got them. Rather jolly ones, I think; only I'm afraid they're too big for your finger." He looked very shamefaced.

Delia put forth her little finger, the same on which she had worn Amabel's rings. They were manifestly too big for it. Then she put forth her middle finger, and for that they were a little too tight.

"What a pity!" said Delia. "And they're such pretty ones; just the sort I like."

"Well, put them on your third finger, then," rejoined the donor.

"Oh, but I couldn't wear them there," said Delia, blushing till her forehead and throat were all one lovely hue of carnation.

In an instant Dick knew why; but it was his destiny

to be a lucky dog. He blushed himself, but he said stoutly, "Why not?"

"Because that's the 'engaged' finger, you know, Dick," she answered.

Dick was holding her hand in one of his, and had the rings in the other.

"Oh," he said, almost with a groan, "what a fool I have been!" And Delia — this exquisite Delia, who all on a sudden had become almost unbearably delightful — Delia was turning away her face from him. "I'm nothing but a schoolboy yet," he said, with deep disgust against himself. "If I had but worked as I ought to have done, it might have been different." But that blush of Delia's was the making of him. "Put them on, if only for a moment," he said, pleadingly. And she let him put them on her "engaged" finger.

"It can only be for a little while," she observed. But how pretty they looked there!

"Even if you won't wear them, you mean to keep them?" he urged.

Delia had closed her dimpled fist, and was looking at them wistfully.

"Suppose you take care of them for me," she said; but she made no movement towards unclosing her hand or taking them off.

"Take care of them till when?"

Delia still looked at them, then her little hand unclosed, and Dick took it in his.

"Coz would be displeased," she whispered.

"You mean that he would, because I've been an idle dog, and because — well, he said it yesterday — because I seem very well content to be loafing about here, doing nothing."

Delia was silent.

"But that's all over now," he added impetuously. "I'm going to Felix directly — this minute. I intend to settle to something at once — forthwith. And then —"

By this time she had taken off the rings, and put them into his hand.

"And then, Delia —" he repeated.

But had not Delia got all she wished for now? Perhaps she thought so. At any rate, Dick's glimpse of paradise was over. "Oh, then," she said (she had such a mischievous little dimple in her cheek when she laughed) — "oh, then — we shall see."

CHAPTER XXXV.

SARAH DE BERENGER was indeed gone; her guiding hand was at last withdrawn.

"I have lost my aunt," Felix would say, and ever after he felt an uneasy want of those fresh and direct expressions of opinion that often showed him what he really thought himself, as well as of her fearless certainties, and her fertile crops of schemes. But he did not know, it never occurred to him to consider, that for many years she had been the doer of everything of the least consequence that had been done in his family.

She was a remarkably foolish woman. Her impressions were vivid and quite unreasonable; they soon ripened into convictions, which never changed. She looked upon all she had become convinced of as fully proved, and she followed out all that was so proved to its just conclusion. There can be little doubt that it is the fools, and not the wise, who govern the world. While the wise are considering, the fools act; while the wise investigate, the fools have made up their minds; by the time the wise have discovered, the fools have made arrangements, and the wise, for the sake of law and order, or, if not, for the sake of peace and quietness, are obliged to give way.

Sarah had first, as she believed, discovered an interesting mystery. She had obliged Hannah Dill, contrary to all her wishes, to bring the mystery near; she had, to her own satisfaction, solved it, and she had, for the sake of it, deprived her own nephews of every shilling she possessed. It was all Sarah's doing that Amias was engaged to a little girl who was supposed by all the neighborhood to have no right to any father's name;

but then it was Sarah's doing also that old Sir Samuel, now he had lost his memory, was more happy in the society of the two girls, and received more tender attentions from them, and more real affection, than from any other creatures. He knew he loved them, and had ceased to consider how it was, and under what mistake, his love had first dawned. If they had been his granddaughters, just so they might have loved him; and they also had ceased, except on important occasions, to consider why this was. They lived under a disadvantage which they had discovered, but then they were saved from the true disadvantage, which would have been far worse to bear. They were always gentle, sweet, and humble, but all was as it ever had been; they could not be unhappy as to their position, for every one about them loved them.

As for Felix, his life for years past had been planned out for him by his aunt Sarah. It is true that he now hopelessly loved this beautiful Delia, but then for many years she and her sister had been his delight, his daily occupation, and his one amusement. He knew that he would not have given up that pleasant, cheerful past, even if by so doing he might have avoided the pain of his present. And even that present, — could he do without it? No; he must watch over Delia's happiness; he could find little rest and joy but in that. He must bring Dick on, help him on or goad him on, for her sake. Perhaps he allowed himself to be more severe on Dick, on her account, than occasion altogether warranted; for Dick was but a youth — a fine, honest, healthy, affectionate youth. Felix considered that Dick was not manly enough; not considering that, but for Delia, he might, perhaps, at his time of life not have been manly at all.

However, Felix changed his mind on one particular morning. Dick had two rings in his pocket. "I will not wear either of them," Delia had said, "till it is decided what you are to be." So Dick had asked to have a conference, a final conference. on this great subject with his two brothers, and then and there he had dis-

cussed it — laid down his own views, stated the *pros* and *cons* of all the plans proposed, and expressed his deep desire to work, in a fashion that perfectly astonished them.

Amias was exceedingly amused. Felix sat back in his chair, and looked at him in puzzled bewilderment.

"Why, you young scamp!" exclaimed Amias. "Want to go to London the day after to-morrow! — want to set to work instantly! Well, I'll do my very best for you, as I declared I would the other day, when you didn't seem to care a straw about it. But I cannot think what has come to you."

"The fact is, Delia says—" Dick began.

"Delia says!" exclaimed Amias, in amazement.

"Delia says—" Dick began again, and again stuck fast.

"Well, out with it, my boy," said Felix, gravely and kindly.

Dick had a little ring-case now in his hand; he put it down, and the ring rolled out on to the table. Dick picked it up and poised it on the top of one of his great fingers. "Delia says she'll never wear this for a schoolboy. She will not be engaged till I have got some career before me — till I have something to do."

"I — think — she — is — quite — right," said Amias, gazing at the ring, and uttering the sentence as if he required to think between every word. He looked so much surprised, however, that Dick, in spite of his nervousness, burst into a short laugh. Then all on a sudden it flashed upon him that Delia was included in this astonishment. He could not bear that this exquisite creature, so wise, so kind, so loving, should be the subject of any disparaging surprise. He thought his own impetuous presumption was alone to blame. He hastened to declare this. He meant to be worthy of her. Change his mind? Nonsense! How could he change his mind? He had loved her all his life better than any one else in the world. He had always helped her with her lessons. When they played at "houses" as children, she was always his little wife.

Everything he said, while more earnest, became more boyish, till Felix said —

"There, my dear boy, think of improving yourself, not of excusing Delia. The best part of your future is already prepared for you; make the rest suitable for it, and all will be well."

And in the mean time Hannah Dill, with her child, entered the town where she feared to find her husband.

The assizes were indeed going on, but to those who were not directly concerned in them, this gave no air of solemnity; there was little about any whom she accosted which answered to the fear and dread and depression in her own mind. And she found herself unable to ask any questions. She looked about, she wandered about, till she found herself in the market-place, and the buildings about it she felt sure were none of them what she wanted. And what was the building she wanted called? She was not sure whether it was a court-house or a session-house, or a prison, and she could not make up her mind to ask. A forlorn hope that she might get a letter from her husband, sustained her till she reached the post-office; for she had written to Uzziah, at their poor home in Whitby, told him where she had gone, and cautiously hinted at her reason. If her panic had been needless, and from some other cause he had left her on the moor, and if he had returned again after her departure, she knew she should get a letter. What a blessed possibility that was! It comforted her while she wandered about. And no less did the strangeness of the place; for she had thought of it till she had formed such a vivid picture of it in her mind, that, now it was under her eyes, and wholly unlike her expectation, it seemed as if all that had any relation to it might also be different, as if the nightmare that had oppressed her might be all unreal. The smiling, bustling market, where fruit was so eagerly bought and sold, the market women so earnest in praising their produce, the old-fashioned red roofs, the comfortable sunshine, the common every-day talk, — could these be

possible if several poor creatures were at that moment in course of being tried for their lives close at hand?

Alas! there was no letter at the office, and no telegraphic message for Hannah Dill. Her child, tired and hungry, began to cry for his dinner, and she felt that, when she reached the court, she should not be allowed to enter unless he was perfectly quiet and good. She hastened into an eating-shop and gave him a comfortable meal, and then, as she glanced out at the window, she saw what she at once perceived to be the place she had looked for; people were hanging about the door, but many more were coming out than going in.

"Why were the people coming away?" she asked. "Were the assizes over?"

"Oh no: but the judges were at lunch; they always had an interval for lunch at that time of day."

"Might one go in and hear the trial?"

"Certainly; a court of justice was always open to the public."

She hardly knew how the next half-hour passed. She was soon standing in the press outside that door. At first all was silence; she seemed to have no chance of getting in. Afterwards there was a little bustle, and voices inside struck upon her frightened ears. Some people were almost as desirous to enter as she was, but her sharpened senses showed her some who were only there for curiosity. "Five shillings, sir, if I get in," she whispered to a stalwart man at her side. Then she turned her pale face, and, selecting another, repeated the same words.

An energetic movement on either side of her soon brought her on. She knew not how it was done, but the money was given, and she was all but inside in a very few minutes. She had not intended to tell her wretched errand, but it was guessed. Her money, and these two men, were powerful enough to bring her to the front; her face did the rest. She stood within, and, being tall, she could see well over the shoulders and heads of those about her, almost all of whom were women.

There was no trembling, no sinking, now; the people were pressed closely together. The atmosphere was stifling. She had a heavy child in her arms, but she knew no fatigue; all her soul was in her eyes, for at present she could hear nothing. Perhaps there was nothing to hear. The place, as she took rapid glances about it, looked almost like a dissenting meeting-house. The crowded spectators seemed to be ranged in compartments not unlike pews. Where would the judges sit?

Oh! now there was a movement; something that pierced her heart with anguish, showed her the judges coming in with all state. These men, who were to doom others to a disgraceful death, were ushered in with honor, with observance. She, poor, wretched woman, felt this with a keenness that had never struck in all her life on her sharpened senses before.

It was right, it must be so; sympathy was all with the law.

In that crowd she felt so utterly alone, as if none of God's creatures could come near enough even to know what she suffered, much less to pity her — the wife of a possible murderer, a possible murderer's child, sleeping with his rosy face resting on her shoulder.

Another movement, which it so chanced brought her a little forwarder, and there were the barristers in their wigs, and a name had been called. Some man answering to the call was in the pulpit-like enclosure, which she at once recognized as the witness-box. Then she saw the prisoner, a pale, small man, whose forlorn face looked as if no courage or strength was left in him. As the witness kissed the book almost carelessly, certainly with perfect composure and confidence, he turned his faded eyes upon him. Hannah Dill lifted up hers.

One fear was over. The prisoner being tried was a stranger; but another fear followed closely. Her instinct justified itself by the event. Sitting among the spectators, and a very little way behind the witness, a man leaning forward gazed and hearkened. Not any change that fear or fatigue or shame had wrought had

so changed him, that she did not instantly recognize the deeply watchful and utterly colorless face. It was her husband.

A terrible trembling seized her, so that she lost the drift and meaning of the first few questions and answers. All her thought was to know the meaning of Uzziah's expression.

His features were sunk, he was wasted almost to a shadow; his eyes were intent on the witness, and yet there was spread over his face a certain awful peace. Her wretched husband was perfectly calm.

She knew not how long she watched him, but it was till another witness was in the box, and it was because of a great change in Uzziah's face that she turned to look and to listen. It was a confident witness — a witness almost too willing. He was being re-examined by the counsel for the prisoner.

"Remember that you are on your oath."

"I do remember it."

"And you swear that this is the man?"

"I could not forget him."

"But it is seventeen years ago."

"Seventeen years and three months."

"A man changes a good deal in seventeen years and three months."

"Ay, but a club-foot, — when one hears it behind one—" Here the witness paused.

"Well?" said the counsel for the prisoner.

"When I heard that man's club-foot, as he was following, I felt as if —"

"You are not to tell the court what you felt."

"Well, I mean I knew that was the very same I heard that fearful time, and I turned myself, and I saw him."

"You saw the prisoner, certainly!"

"Ay; and I knew him at once, and spoke at once. Said I, 'We have met before.'"

"And as another witness has proved, he answered, 'Not to my knowledge.' Now, what had you beside the peculiar sound of the club-foot to go on, when you

said to a man whom, by your own showing, you had not seen for seventeen years, 'We have met before'?"

"It was the same man," persisted the witness. "I knew him at once, *and he knew me.*"

"How did you know him? Tell the jury that."

"It was the lock of hair, partly, that hung over his forehead, and, partly, it was the oval shape of his face, as he leaned over poor Cambourne after he'd struck him, that I remembered."

"It's false!" cried a voice that rang through the court; "it's false! You, William Tasker, don't look at the prisoner; look here, look at me!"

Cries of "Turn that man out," were heard. There was confusion in the place where the sound had proceeded from; a woman fell down in a fainting fit; people rose in their places; but before the officer could reach the man who had spoken, some were helping the woman out, others had started away from him. He was standing alone, leaning on a rail in front.

"You, William Tasker, he repeated, "look at me!"

The terrified witness turned hastily, and gazed at him as if fascinated. The counsel for the prisoner paused. In one terrible instant every eye was upon Uzziah Dill. From the judges downwards all gazed at him — a lame man, with an oval face, and a lock of hair that strayed over his forehead.

He leaned forward, with eyes wide open. He and the witness gazed at one another, and the unfortunate wife gazed also; saw the officers advancing through the crowd to remove Uzziah; heard the witness cry out in a lamentable voice, and beat his breast, "I've sworn against the innocent, and there the guilty stands!" and then heard (not one syllable was spared to her) — heard her husband's answer, as they were about to lead him away, "You've said the truth now, William Tasker; 'twas I that did it. The Lord have mercy on my sinful soul!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SOME time after this, Hannah Dill seemed to come back again — she knew not from whence — and she was sitting on some stone steps in a quiet flagged court. The sun was shining — that was the first thing she noticed; then she observed that she herself was in the shadow; that her child, rubbing his cheek against her sleeve, was caressing her with "Mummy, mummy;" and that a tall gentleman was leaning over her, a gentleman whom she had seen before.

"Do you know me, Mrs. Dill?" he asked her kindly.

She thought he might have said that several times before.

"Yes, sir," she answered in a low, dull voice. "It's Mr. Bartlett."

"What can I do for you?"

"I want to go to poor Dill."

"You cannot do that now, my poor friend. He has accused himself; he has given himself up."

"I knew he would," she replied, quite calmly. "That other man's wife is happy now, and I—"

"Your misfortune is very great," said Mr. Bartlett. "I pity you deeply."

"I saw the prisoner's wife get her arms round his neck and hug him, while they led my wretched husband away."

"Have you any place to go to — have you lodgings here?"

"No, sir."

"Well, then, I must arrange for you."

He went quickly from her, and a lady, who seemed

to have been standing above her on the steps, came down and addressed her with sympathetic gentleness.

She knew it was Mrs. Bartlett, but the shock she had sustained had been too much for her; her mind was blank and dull. She uttered her passing impressions: "I never thought to see them here; they don't live here?"

"No," said Mrs. Bartlett, glad to foster this momentary lapse from the dread reality. "No; we don't live here, but my father and mother do. This is their house; we are come to stay with them."

After that Hannah Dill knew not at all how many hours or weeks might have passed, when one day, awaking in a decent bed, she found that she was cool; that the furniture, which had long seemed to whirl about her, had settled in its place; that the swarms of passing strangers, who had appeared night and day to approach her bed and gaze at her, were all gone. She slept a good deal that night, and in the morning awoke aware of what had occurred, and able to think.

She had a nurse, as she perceived, but she could not bear to question her. It was not till Mr. Bartlett, hearing she was sensible, came to see her, and brought his wife, that she spoke, sending down the nurse, and gazing at them with hollow, frightened eyes.

"Is he condemned, sir?"

She lay long silent when Mr. Bartlett had told her, by a pitying gesture, that it was so. At last Mrs. Bartlett said, "You must think of your dear little boy, Mrs. Snaith, and try to get better for his sake. He is very well; I have seen that he was well done by."

"Ma'am, I know you have a mother's heart. Is there no hope for Dill, sir? Must he die that death?"

"He is quite resigned," said Mr. Bartlett, instead of answering her.

"Oh, my God!" cried the poor woman, folding her hands; "have pity on him and on our innocent child!"

"Yes, your innocent child," said Mrs. Bartlett. "In all this bitter misery, Mrs. Snaith, there is one gleam of comfort, and that concerns him. Nobody here knows

your husband's name; he has refused to divulge it. He has shown a father's heart in that respect."

"It was his duty. Does he know that I have been so ill?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I must go to him!"

"You cannot yet."

"Oh, I might be too late!"

"There are many days yet. You will not be too late. Your husband has been very ill himself. He has had an epileptic fit."

There are some things that appear quite unendurable; they bear down the soul under such a weight of misery, that life seems impossible. And yet they will not kill; they are not thus to come to their desired end.

When Hannah Dill and her husband met, they both looked the mere shadows of their former selves. They sat hand in hand in the condemned cell, and neither spoke. It seemed a comfort to the wretched prisoner to have his wife by his side, but he never had anything to say. Sometimes he was reading his Bible when she appeared, sometimes he was kneeling in prayer,—always deeply humble and generally quite calm, for he was not agitated by any hope; his doom was fixed.

One day, as she was about to leave him, he bared his thin arm, and said, "Oh, Hannah, sometimes I hope—"

"Hope you may die first?" she whispered.

"Ay."

"I spoke to Mr. Bartlett about that," she answered. "My poor husband! he says, for all their suffering, the condemned do not die. And you are at peace. But oh, that it might be!" she broke out, bursting into tears. Then, trying to calm herself, she said, "You are a man forgiven of God, as we both for ever trust; but you have always known that at last you deserved to suffer—and suffer you would."

"Oh that it was over!—oh that it was done!" she said, when she got home; and she was so wretchedly ill all that night, that she feared to be laid up again,

and unable to go to him. But just at sunrise, as she had dropped into an uneasy doze, a flattering dream came to her; she thought she saw her husband standing at the foot of the bed, and that his eyes were full of a rapturous calm.

While she looked, some noise startled her, and she woke, mourning over the sweetness of that short respite. How hard that it should have been wrested from her! But there was a noise again; it was under her window. Some one called out her name. She started up. Mr. Bartlett was below. He told her to dress herself and come down to him.

Oh, how beautiful the sunrise was, when she came out, how pure and peaceful!

"Your husband is very ill," he whispered to her; "the chaplain has obtained leave for you to come to him. He had another fit last night."

Her dream had still dominion over her, and she looked at the sunrise; but she hastened to the prison, and was soon in his cell.

Two people were there, the doctor and a warder. They were not sympathetic, not pitiful, merely attentive to what was before them. Her husband was speaking; his voice was perfectly strange to her—a tremulous, piping voice. "Yes, they tempted me; they gave me the drink, sir. I was three-parts drunk when I did it."

The doctor and the warder parted, to let her come to the narrow bed. The signs of his sore struggle during the fit were visible on his face, and on the bruised arms and disordered bed, but he was perfectly calm now; the sunrise was fair upon his wasted features.

He spoke again. "And the mercy of the most Merciful is over all His works. I trust in Him that I die forgiven." A slight convulsive movement passed over his face, and then there was a deep sigh. She was kneeling beside him now.

"There," said the doctor, coming forward with grave indifference, "I said he would not last more than the twelve hours from the time of the seizure. It's half-past six o'clock."

"Is my poor husband dead, sir?" asked the wife.

"Yes, my good woman — dead."

"May I —"

"You may do nothing at all but leave the prison," interrupted the doctor, with more kindness of manner.

"Not have his poor body to bury it?"

"You may do nothing at all but leave the prison," he repeated; and she rose at once, and Mr. Bartlett took her home again.

A widow, and all that day lying on her bed, unable to lift herself up, and yet lost in a rapture of thankfulness, blessing God for her own and her poor husband's sake.

But the shock of all she had gone through was more than she could bear, and for several weeks she was so utterly prostrate, that to rise, and for an hour or two daily to sit trembling by her fire, was all she could accomplish. She had still money left, and there would be more to come to her in a few weeks, so that she was able to pay for what she wanted. Her kind friends, the Bartletts, were gone.

She was quite alone, but, on the whole, she was happy. Her husband, she believed, was at rest, and forgiven. His real name had not transpired; she was no longer in fear, and was free from the corroding care she had suffered on his account, and seen him suffer.

What still oppressed her was Miss de Berenger's will. As soon as she was able, she must go and seek her children, and, if possible, induce them to give up the bequest. She was too weak to write, too weak to move; it was not till some time in the month of November, some weeks after her husband's death, that, finding how very little of her money was left, she roused herself, and selling all she had that she could possibly spare, set off in the railway with her child. She had an urgent longing upon her to see justice done. Her children could not prosper if they had, however innocently, brought loss upon the family which had cherished them.

And yet how little she could with safety tell them. She pondered over this during the dreary night's journey

in the parliamentary train, and almost despaired. There was still nothing but concealment before her. Her daughters would meet her with kindly condescension, though she had gone off from them so suddenly. Yes, and each of them she hoped — she was sure — would give her a kiss. But she had robbed herself of all claim on them; even the bond of faithful service was broken.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MRS. JOLLIFFE was a woman of consequence—of much more consequence, in some respects, than Mr. de Berenger, though she was generally considered to be a servant, and he a master. On all great occasions, Mrs. Jolliffe could make her power felt, and one was approaching.

In fact, the very next day, namely, the eighteenth of November, was to be the most important that for many years had dawned on the De Berenger family. A very large goose pie was at that moment baking in honor of it. Cakes, without end, were ranged on the dressers, to be given away in the village. There was great rolling of pastry, stuffing of fowls, clearing of jelly, stoning of plums, roasting of beef. Mrs. Jolliffe was making all her subordinates miserable for fear the oven shouldn't go. It generally went very well; there was no special reason why it should not then. It never had failed since Master came of age. A modest festival had been given on that occasion, and the crust of the pie was burnt.

Nobody in the kitchen had any peace till that goose pie was out of the oven, and was all one clear expanse of gold-colored crust.

"And quite a credit to you, ma'am," cried the two village matrons who were come to help. Mrs. Jolliffe was pacified for the moment, but now she began to fret about the partridges and the custards, "for, indeed, a wedding is not a thing that takes place every day," she remarked.

"And hadn't need," sighed her weary subordinates.

"There wasn't as much of a spread when Mr. Amias

was christened as I could have wished to see," continued Mrs. Jolliffe, who never forgot anything, "and I remember as well as can be, how I said to her that was cook at that time, 'I hope, if the blessed babe lives to eat his wedding breakfast, he'll see finer victuals on the table by half, and more of them.'"

"You might have said you hoped he would make a fine bridegroom," observed one of the attendants.

"But I did not," replied Mrs. Jolliffe, impressively, "and so I tell you truly. But we have all heard that marriages are made in heaven, and so I believe they are — a picked few of them — this for one. Never was anything like the conveniency of it. Miss Sarah's money going to her own nephew, the right crest on Miss Amabel's share of the plate, and all their things marked 'A. B.,' both of them."

"It's very interesting," said the scullery girl; and Mrs. Jolliffe, finding that she had time to pause and be amused when the success of the breakfast hung yet in the balance, severely ordered her into the back kitchen to wash potatoes.

It was long past midnight when Mrs. Jolliffe, satisfied at last, locked up the house and crept up to bed. The servants, all extremely tired, slept heavily and later than usual.

The bridegroom, as perhaps might have been expected, was first awake, and rang for his hot water.

He was in the little room which had been his from a boy. It led out of his brother's room, and commanded a view of the church and the lawn, on which grew two very fine fir trees.

Amias drew up his blind; rather a thick sprinkling of snow had fallen in the night. It was still snowing. A dark and rather misty morning. The two trees stood like two tall sharp spires, and a tree or shrub of singular shape appeared between them. It did not seem to be so thickly covered with snow as the other shrubs. He looked at it with interest; it was singularly like the figure of a woman crouching down against the fir tree as if for shelter. A curious freak of the frost, as he thought

it. Yes, like even to the minute details; for there, bent down, might be the head, and there, falling into regular creases, was what might be the hood of her cloak!

It *was* a woman!

He called his brother out of his room to look at it. They even thought they saw it move, and both, hurriedly throwing on their clothes, ran down. The shape had already attracted attention below. Felix and Amias had plenty of help, and the helpless creature, not stiff, not insensible, but only powerless to move, was carried into the warm nursery and laid on a couch. Her attitude, as they raised her, was easily explained. She was crouching over a beautiful, rosy child, so as to shield him from the cold. Her cloak folded him to her, and he was warm and sleeping, having leaned against her shoulder.

Hannah Dill! She looked worn and wan; her hair had many streaks of gray in it, and her hollow eyes told of pain and grief and trouble. She made no complaint; her eyes followed her child, and when she saw that they were attending to him, giving him breakfast and warming him, she appeared to sink away into an exhausted sleep.

It was about eight o'clock, and the family were not down. It was not to be expected that at such a time more attention could be devoted to the poor, uninvited visitor than was absolutely needful, especially as she could not talk; but in about an hour she was able to drink some hot tea. Then she seemed to notice that Felix had come in and was standing near her. Mr. Brown, the doctor, was also present.

"And you say she spoke when you first found her under the tree?" he said to Felix.

"Yes; we raised her up, my brother and I, and she stood between us."

Jolliffe took the child, and remarked at the same moment, "She has a widow's cap on."

Then she said faintly, "My poor husband is dead. I trust he went to God."

"She is coming round," said the doctor. "Well, Mrs. Snaith, do you feel better?"

Hannah Dill looked about her. "I had not been there long — there under the tree. It did not seem long," she said, addressing Felix. "I wanted so to see them," she presently added, while the doctor continued to feel her pulse and regard her attentively.

"Her strength must have failed just as she got near the house," he observed, "and she sank down. The cold has done the rest. See how she gazes at the door."

"The young ladies are not dressed yet, Mrs. Snaith," said Felix, using her old familiar name. "You shall see them shortly. So you were not long under the tree?"

"No; they put me out at four o'clock at the town. I walked on, for my money was all spent, and my boy was hungry."

And this was the wedding morning. Neither of the two brothers liked that Amabel and Delia should begin it with the sight of their old nurse, and the story of what she must have suffered.

Amias came in first with Delia, all in white array as a bridesmaid; her lovely face was sweet and pitiful, but she shrank a little when she saw the hollow-eyed woman stretched on a couch and motionless, except for the turning of her eyes. She came, and, leaning over her, kissed her kindly, and noticing a sort of rapture that came over the poor face, said, "Mamsey dear, you'll be better soon."

Mamsey had hold of a fold of tarlatan. "What does it mean?" she asked with entreating eyes.

"Why, the wedding, Mamsey — the wedding; that's what it means!"

"You to be married, my beauty bright? You!"

"Oh no," cried Delia, all dimples and blushes; "no. But don't look so frightened, dear."

"Who is it, then?" said Mamsey very faintly.

"Amabel."

"Then I'm too late," said Mamsey. "I hoped the Lord would let me get here in time. It can't be helped."

What could she mean? She spoke so slowly, and

seemed so disturbed, that Amias said, "And why should it be helped, Mamsey? Everybody wishes for it."

"Who's the gentleman," she mourned out; "tell me his name."

"Why, his name is the same as mine," answered Amias, smiling down upon her with joy in his dark eyes. "I am the gentleman!"

"You, sir — you?"

"Yes, I — Mr. Amias de Berenger. You remember me, surely."

"Well, then, it's all right," she murmured. "Wonderful goodness of God! I bless His holy Name."

Strangely solemn words; they seemed to have little relation to the circumstances, and she fell away, after saying them, into a kind of faint.

"The bride had better see her before she goes to church," observed the doctor to Felix, who had come in again.

"Why?" asked Felix.

The doctor looked at him. "I think it might be better," he said.

"She changes very much, surely, sir," said Mrs. Jolliffe. "I don't see that she seems to rally."

Hannah Dill recovered from her faint and again gazed towards the door. Delia presently re-entered it, with the rosy little unknown brother in her arms. And after her, floating onwards, lovely and pensive and pitiful, came Amabel, in her bridal gown and floating veil.

"Put it back," she said, "that I may kiss Mamsey."

Amias put the veil back for her, and she looked quietly into his eyes. Then she came on and kissed the prostrate invalid, and sat down beside her. The mother and child for several minutes held each other by the hand. Amabel appeared instinctively to feel that Mamsey was feeding her heart and comforting herself with the sight of her. She sat gently and sweetly beside her to allow this, but it cannot be supposed that at such a time, within half an hour of her marriage ceremony, she was able to give any very deep attention to her old nurse.

It was Delia who first spoke; she had a sudden idea

that human faces seldom could look like Mamsey's long. It must be her own little experience, she thought, that made her feel alarmed, but she yielded to a sudden impulse; she would say the kindest thing in the world, whatever was the event.

"Mamsey dear, look at me — look! I've got the dear, pretty little boy in my arms," she said, in a cheerful and comforting voice. "You will come and live here again, won't you? But if you don't stay, Mamsey — do you understand? — I shall always take care of him."

The dying eyes appeared to thank her; they wandered over the three faces with a wondrous rapture of peace and joy.

"And yet," she presently whispered, "it's not said, and I cannot say it."

"Say what, Mamsey?" asked Delia.

Her eyes fell upon Delia's hand; she saw the rings. "You engaged too, my sweetest sweet?"

For all answer Delia lifted her hand to her lips, and kissed the rings she had so lately begun to wear.

A spasm of anguish passed over the mother's face; all the light and joy in it was gone.

"Do you love *him?*" she whispered.

Delia murmured, "Oh yes."

"And I've no time to speak," Mamsey repeated. "Miss Sarah's money — Miss Sarah —"

"She's wandering!" exclaimed Amabel.

"Never mind Cousin Sarah's money, dear," said Delia caressingly — her lovely face was all dimples and blushes; her happiness was so new to her — "look at these instead. Don't you want to know who gave them to me?" she whispered. She leaned down till her cheek almost touched her mother's shoulder.

"Who did?" replied Mamsey.

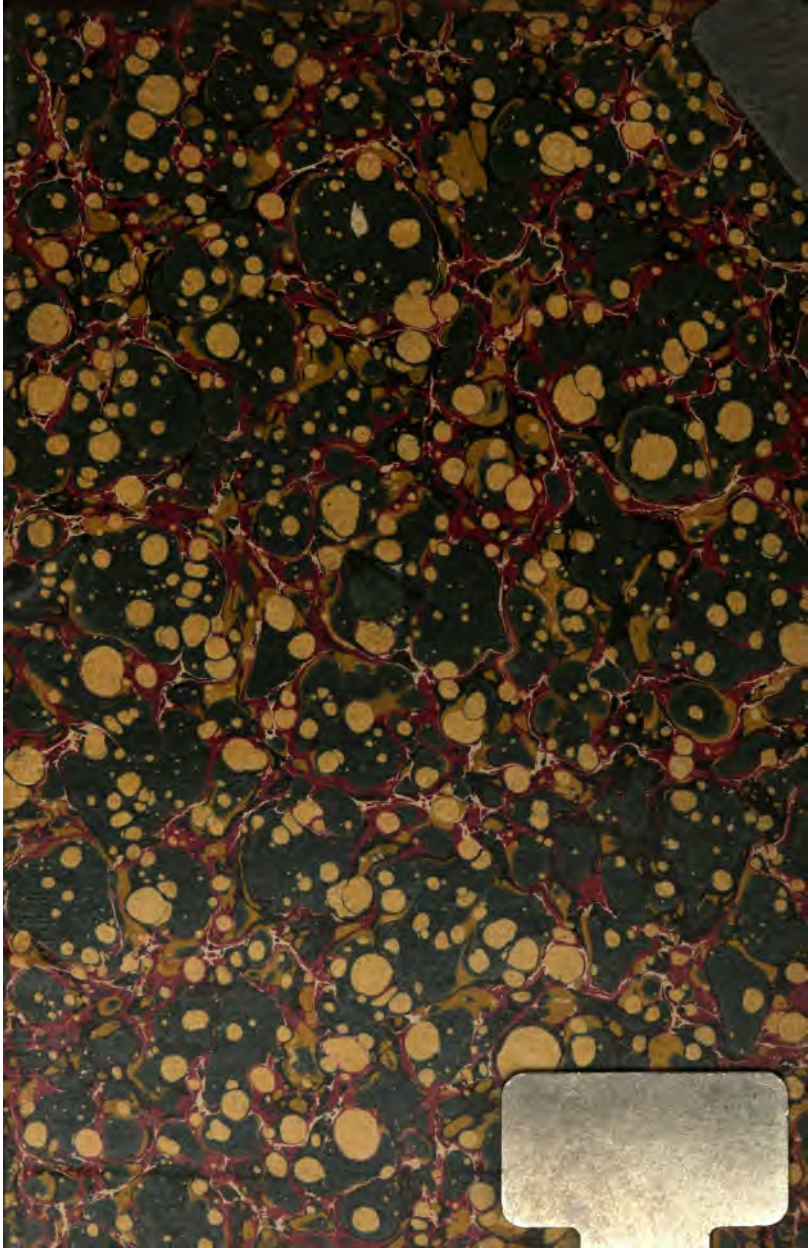
Delia could but just hear the words. Mamsey had hold of her ringed hand now. Delia lifted up her face, and answered those beseeching eyes. "Who did? Why — Dick!"

Then the clasp of that cold hand was relaxed, and there came back again a strange rapture of peace. Delia

watched it and wondered, till some one came to the door and called the girls away. They gave each a kindly look to their old nurse, and passed out of the room, Delia still having the baby boy in her arms.

They all passed out of that room indeed, at the same moment; — the children to the lot which had been won for them, the mother to her rest.

If it was failure so to live and so to die, having given up all things, even her own children — to live not thanked, and to die not known — yet still it was the failure she had chosen; and there are some who, reflecting on such a life, would say, "If that be failure, let me so fail."

THE END.

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